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THE WHITE LADYE OF ROSEMOUNT.

THE WHITE LADYE OF ROSEMOUNT

A Story of the Modern Stage.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "CURLY: AN ACTOR'S STORY," "MEMOIRS OF SAMUEL PHELPS,"
"REMINISCENCES OF CHARLES READE," "PLAYERS AND PLAYWRIGHTS,"
ETC.

"And one was far apart, and one was near:
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bow the grass!
And one was water, and one star was fire,
And one will ever shine, and one will pass,
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that move the mere!"

TENNISON.

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THE WHITE LADYE OF ROSEMOUNT.

PROLOGUE.

“ Yet here for me, though heart and will are master
As strong as iron and as calm as death,
The will will waver, and the heart beat faster,
Touched by the memory of a woman's breath ”

HERMAN MERIVALE.

PEOPLE said the Theatre House at Rosemount was haunted, and so it was—one room especially—a strange, weird room—a room with crannies and niches, and cupboards and cabinets, and a huge embayed window, in front of which stood the noblest minster in all broad England, perhaps in all the world.

Besides the choice pictures, the quaint furniture, and rare books, this room was filled with rarer memories.

If it could but speak, what strange stories it could tell !

In this house, more than a century ago, the poor nonjuring Savoy parson's famous son, whom beautiful, cruel Peg Woffington drove penniless from London, found a home.

Here, in this very room, he entertained the learned Bruin and obsequious Bozzy, on their way back from

the Hebrides; and the Doctor smacked his lips over the larded capon and the good red wine, while he thanked Heaven he was in a Christian land once more, and on his way back to Fleet Street.

Here jovial James Quin discussed John Dory, the Duke's venison, and the Bishop's claret with honest Tate.

Here the great little Davy (prince of actors and of gentlemen) "set the table on a roar" at the expense of insolent Sam Foote. Here young Dick Sheridan lost his last shilling at Faro, and then borrowed ten guineas to take him to town.

Here, too, the red-coated bullies demanded that gaunt John Kemble should apologize for becoming pretty Elizabeth Inchbald's champion, what time the brave lad, fresh from Douay, said, "My father is a gentleman, and my father's son can never be cajoled or coerced into an act unworthy of a gentleman. I will not apologize!"

Here great Sarah Siddons, descending from her pedestal, "took snuff sometimes, and sometimes tea."

Here, too, a wretched, ragged girl from Ireland stood trembling before the despot of the North—a girl hereafter destined to witch all eyes and win all hearts, as the spirit of comedy incarnate, in the form of Dorothea Jordan.

Here reckless, dissolute George Frederick Cooke—and, later, the divine Edmund, greatest of actors and blackguards—became "o'er all the ills of life victorious."

Here John Emery, little Knight, Listen, and the elder Mathews came, quaking to hear the managerial verdict—actor or no actor?

Here Elliston, the Dean, and the manager, got "regal" together.

Here, too, in later days, gallant Charles Kemble, classic Charles Young, grim Macready, "Gladiator" Forrest, rare old Sam Phelps, genial Charles Kean, "Bucky" Ben Webster, the fascinating Fechter, the ever young Charles Mathews, poor Gus Brooke, glorious Charles Dickens and leonine Charles Reade have sat and laughed "o'er the walnuts and the wine," and many a time and oft have helped to speed the happy hours away.

Alas! the days that are no more!

Here, too, on this bleak winter's night, sat Frank Fairfax, the manager of the Great Northern Circuit, reading the faces in the fire, and conjuring up, amidst the glowing embers, "the loved, the lost, the distant and the dead."

Suddenly a loud double "rat-tat" disturbed his reverie.

Footsteps on the stairs followed; then a gentle tap at the door of the historic room here described.

"Come in," said the manager.

To him enters Brown, his valet, with a telegram.

"Any answer, sir?"

"No."

"Please, sir, boy says, may he go into the pit?"

"Oh, yes—that is, if there is any room." Then, looking at his watch, "Stop! how came it that this was not delivered before?"

"Boy said it was delayed in transmission, in consequence of snow deranging wires, sir."

"Confound the snow! It may delay the train as well. We haven't a moment to lose. Go to the

station, Brown. Mind you are there at a quarter to ten. Have a cab ready to meet the express from the North. There will be a young lady in the train—tall, slight, fair hair, dark eyes and eyebrows. You can't mistake her. Make my compliments—say I have had a busy day at Castletown or I would have met her myself. Bring her here.

"Stay! When you have brought her, run round to Mrs. Macnamara and secure Miss Vigo's rooms as soon as she leaves for Newcastle. Post these letters as you pass the post-office. Send these telegrams, and tell Mrs. Brown to come up immediately. Sharp's the word. Look alive." And off went Brown.

The manager sighed as he murmured—

"Twenty years ago! and yet it seems as if it were but yesterday!

"She was a flirt, and I was a fool; but *he*, at least, knew his own mind—the scoundrel!

"Yes, and he subdued her to his stronger will. If I had only spoken then!

"Ah! well—'He who will not, when he may—' "

Another tap at the door, and Mrs. Brown, the house-keeper, enters.

"Mrs. Brown," said Fairfax, "in an hour's time let me have a plate of soup, an omelette, a macaroni cheese, a pint of mulled claret, and a bottle of Roederer. In an hour, you understand."

"Yes, sir."

"And tell Emma to clear my traps out, and put them in the Ghost Room."

"The G—ghost Room, sir?"

"Yes, and be sure there are roaring fires. A young lady, who is coming, will sleep in my room to-night."

“ Lord, sir, you don’t mean—”

“ Yes, I do ; so off you go, and be quick about the supper.”

And away went Mrs. Brown, sorely exercised in her mind about her instructions.

The manager paced up and down in agitation, and half muttered to himself, half murmured aloud—

“ Yes, it all comes back. We were to have met as usual on the top of the Calton Hill at two o’clock.

“ I was at my post an hour before my time. The place was deserted. I sat looking at the blue Firth, counting the tardy minutes. Then I lighted a weed, and lost myself in a day dream—how happy we should be together—she and I.

“ I was brought back to earth by voices—hers and *his*. The sound arose from beneath my feet, ever so far down below.

“ I rose, and looked over the edge of the precipice. I saw them—I can see them now—as he held her to his breast, and forced a ring upon her finger. I thought she seemed to struggle for one moment—but the next—their lips met—and then—!”

The very hour after that on which he discovered the treachery of his friend and the perfidy of his sweetheart, Fairfax broke his engagement, shook the dust of Edinburgh from his feet, turned his face to the south, and from that time he never crossed the Border again—never again looked upon her face in life ; and yet, even now, he saw a fair young girl and a boy strolling hand in hand together, plucking flowers on the Calton Hill on the young May morning, all those long years ago.

Then came the obverse of the picture. He, that

other one—the false friend, the profligate, the drunkard—he who had embittered the life of her whom he had sworn to love and cherish.

“D—n him ! Oh ! d—n him !” exclaimed Fairfax, chafing with the memory of that unforgotten, unforgiven wrong.

After a time he paused and softened. Then he drew two letters from his breast coat pocket ; the first was written in a feeble, feminine hand ; it was blotted here and there, and ran thus :—

“ DEAR FRANK.

“ May I call you so once more for the sake of auld lang syne ?

“ Though so many years have passed since we parted, I have never lost sight of your bright career ; I have always rejoiced in your triumphs, though, alas !—well, well—you have been amply avenged by my most unhappy marriage.

“ Long before I became a widow my sole consolation was my child, my little Clara, soon, I fear, to be left an orphan. She was eighteen last birthday. Though proud and impetuous, she is tender, truthful, and affectionate. I hope a mother’s partiality does not mislead me, but I really think that there is a great future before her. My poor darling is eating her heart out in these obscure places, and she has made me write you.

“ It has been a great effort, for I am very feeble to-day. .

“ Frank, dear Frank, you will help my poor child for ‘ Maria’s ’ sake, won’t you ? I can write no more ; it has become all at once so—”

Here the letter terminated abruptly.

The manager paused, overcome with emotion. After awhile, he read the other letter, which was written in bold and vigorous characters, and was to this effect :—

“IVY VILLA, KILMARNOCK,
“December 18th, 187—.

“DEAR MR. FAIRFAX,

“I send you my mother’s letter just as she left it. After she had written the last line, she said to me—

“‘It is very dark, my child.’

“Alas! The darkness was in her own eyes. An hour afterwards she had found the light!

“I am glad that her sufferings are at an end; of late they have been more than she could endure, or I could bear to see.

“Your name was the last upon her lips.

“I feel how almost indelicate it may appear to broach such a subject at such a time, but I have now to face the world alone.

“If it should please you to entrust me with an engagement in your company, I will endeavour to merit your commendation.

“I am,

“Dear Mr. Fairfax,

“Most respectfully yours,

“CLARA TREVOR.”

As he returned the letters to his breast, he murmured, “Poor child! Poor mother!”

More than twenty years ago Frank Fairfax made his first appearance at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, as Charles Surface.

On that occasion he met for the first time, Lucy Seymour. She was the "Maria" of the comedy; it is but a small part, but "amidst the follies, the vanities, the deceits and vices" of the fashionable crew of scandalmongers by which she is surrounded, this simple country maiden stands out an angel of innocence and purity.

How well he recalled the young, frank, lovely face, the symmetrical figure, the simple white muslin frock, the bunches of black ribbon, the large Leghorn hat, the sunny glory of the golden hair, the lustrous, timid, dark eyes.

As he spoke the concluding lines—

"Though thou, dear maid, shouldst waive thy beauty's sway,
Thou still must rule, because I will obey,"

he stooped and kissed her hand. He could see her now as she flushed to the temples, and looked up with her great wondering eyes into his—and then—he—

"Psha!" he exclaimed aloud, as he started up impatiently, "what avails regret? Regret cannot recall the dead, and as for me, I'll stand—

"'As if a man were author of himself,
And knew no other kin.'

Hark! what's that?"

The loud rattle of carriage wheels, followed by a louder rat-tat at the door.

A moment later, and Brown announces, "Miss Trevor." The quick, light step of an elastic foot, the rustle of a woman's dress is heard, and Clara Trevor stands in the doorway.

The cynic, who a moment ago resolved to stand henceforth alone—the man whose dreary home had never been illumined by the light of a woman's

smile, or made glad by the music of a woman's voice—stands spell-bound as the apparition of the lost love of his youth starts into life again before him.

The girl had bounded forward, as if about to spring into the room, but paused and stood upon the threshold irresolute, as if uncertain of her welcome.

Her little sealskin hat had fallen from her head, her beautiful hair, released at that very moment from its confines, fell in thick flakes of burnished gold down her shoulders and below her waist, over a rough cloak or coat of fulvous vecuna, on the right arm of which she wore a large black band of crape. Her cheeks were suffused with blushes, her eyes were fixed full on him, as if timidly appealing.

He looked at her and through her, to years gone by, but stood still and spoke not.

She trembled and turned pale as death.

At last he extended his arms, and then, with a great tremor in his voice, as if in a dream, he uttered one word, and only one—it was “Maria!”

She understood the meaning and the memory, and ere the sound had faded from his lips she lay sobbing on his breast.

He caressed and soothed her. Then he said—“You know me?”

“Know you?” she answered, smiling through her tears, “I should have known you anywhere from mamma's description. She has told me of you so often that I feel as if I had known you all my life.”

“You have your mother's eyes, your mother's smile, your mother's voice, child,” he replied, gravely. Then, ringing the bell, he desired the servant to show the girl to her room.

While she is taking off her wraps above let me endeavour to describe the man in the room below.

He was about forty-five, but might have passed for ten years younger. Tall, straight as a dart, rather slender, hair of deep brown, a little streaked with grey at the temples, a massive brow, piercing grey eyes, a straight Grecian nose, oval face, mouth firm, almost severe. He had a somewhat repellant demeanour to strangers or intruders—a sort of “stand off” air—but to those who knew him and esteemed him, whether in the theatre or in society, he was both engaging and complaisant. He had literary tastes, wielded a facile and a fertile pen, was an admirable and accomplished actor and a great stage manager, and he knew it; so did everyone for that matter.

His whole career had been one social and artistic triumph, and yet he thought, on this particular night—yes—he—whatever he thought, his speculations were cut short by the return of his *protégée*.

Truly she made a charming picture, with her black cashmere dress, fastened up to the throat, with its plain bands of white at the neck and wrists, and a jet buckle at the slender waist. This simple costume displayed to rare advantage the graceful curves and exquisite undulations of her supple and beautiful figure.

She took the head of the table as if she had been accustomed to it.

It seemed as if it really were as she had said—that she had known him all her life; and, for his part, he felt as if he had taken up some link in his past existence that had been lost ever so long ago.

After supper he opened his cigar-case and said—

"May I?"

"Certainly," she replied, "if I may light it for you. I always lighted papa's."

A slight cloud came over his brow. He hesitated a moment, and then said—

"Very well, you shall light mine if you will call me papa."

"May I?" she inquired, shyly.

"Yes," he answered; "and I will call you Clara."

They chatted away until he had finished his cigar. Then he rang the bell, and said—"To-morrow you shall do as you please, but I must be master to-night. You had better go to bed, child."

"You forget; you promised to call me Clara, papa."

"Well, Clara, then. God bless you, Clara."

And he kissed her as her father might have done, as he bade her good-night.

When she reached her room (his chamber that was) she heard the moaning of the wind soughing round the gables of the old house. Save for this gruesome sound, all was still. The theatre was over long ago, and the heart of the city was at rest.

From afar, through the stillness of the night, came the shriek of the steam-whistle and the throbbing of the engine, as the iron horse ploughed his way through the snow up to the bleak North.

The great bell of the minster tolled the midnight hour. The sound vibrated through the house, which it filled with a strange weird music; then each church tower in the city rang out its answer, and ere the melody had melted into morning she lay sleeping with a smile upon her lips.

Meanwhile the lonely man below still sat reading the faces in the fire.

At last he started up, ejaculating sadly and bitterly — "And she might have been my child!"

Passing forth, he paused upon the landing while he called for his valet.

"Have you taken those rooms for Miss Trevor?" he inquired.

"No, sir; it was too late."

"Very well, then; I've altered my mind, and you needn't trouble Mrs. Macnamara. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

And with that Fairfax entered the Ghost Room.

A strange eerie place it was; so, in fact, was the theatre itself. It was built amidst the ruins of an ancient convent, many of the walls of which had been utilized in the construction. The pit was laid over the oldest Norman arch in England, and in excavating the "well" of the stage a subterranean passage had been discovered which communicated with the abbey on the other side the river's bank.

From time immemorial the legend of "The White Ladye" had impermeated the place. It was an all too common story of the Dark Ages. A poor nun, who had been faithless to her vows, had been buried alive with her baby in a niche within those gloomy walls.

There was not a servant about the theatre who was not prepared to swear that he or she had seen at some time or other the apparition of "The White Ladye" in or about, going into, or coming out of, the "Ghost Room."

Leigh, the London manager, an old chum of Fair-

fax's, slept there one night. He declared that at six o'clock in the morning, in the open day, with the summer sun streaming through the window, he awoke and saw a beautiful young woman in a nun's habit, with a baby in her arms, standing at the foot of his bed; that he got up to speak to her; that she disappeared through a recess, which he opened, and found to be a false cupboard, merely masking a niche in the old convent wall. Whether this was an hallucination or not, it is certain that, although he had accepted an invitation to remain a week, Leigh precipitately left Rosemount the very next morning.

The wealth of the Indies would not have tempted Mrs. Brown to have slept a single night in the haunted chamber, and whenever that estimable woman arranged the room she always had Emma, the housemaid, to assist her, and Brown within hail.

Fairfax, however, did not believe in ghosts; he used to say he had seen too many of them—from "The Bleeding Nun" and "The Castle Spectre" up to "The Corsican Brothers."

Yet, sceptic as he was, that night Frank Fairfax saw, or perhaps he only dreamt that he saw, a ghost!

As he laid his head upon the pillow, fixing his eyes upon the fading fire, which filled the room with a dim mystic light, the face which had haunted him all through the night emerged from the embers and grew and grew until it took the shadowy semblance of a fair woman in white, with bunches of transparent black about her lovely shoulders; a large fleecy hat, with gauze-like ribbons, thin as a spider's web, hung from her slender wrist; thick, long flakes of fair hair streamed down her shoulders, around her fair head was a golden

nimbus, beneath which her large dark eyes shone like stars.

The shadow glided towards him, and he faced *it* without fear. *It* placed its arms around his neck, and pushed the hair from his brow, and kissed him, and murmured in a low, soft voice—

“Love her, Frank, dear, love her!”

Then he made answer—

“Oh! my love, my lost love! I will be a father to her for your dear sake!”

Whereupon “The White Ladye” smiled with a radiant smile, and kept watch over his pillow while he slept, and chased the evil spirits of the night away.

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CHAPTER I.

LOVE, LORD OF ALL.

"Love lacked a dwelling, and made him her place."

* * * * *

"She lifted up her eyes
And loved him with that love which was her doom."

THREE years had passed rapidly away since Clara Trevor's advent at Rosemount—three years of happiness for Fairfax and his adopted daughter—who had become light, life, air, and sunshine to him. For those three years he had been brighter and happier than he had ever been since that day on the Calton so long ago.

Had she been his own flesh and blood she could not have been nearer or dearer to him. As for her, she adored the very ground on which he walked.

It was a blessed night for both when that train from the North brought the orphan girl to the theatre house at Rosemount.

Her mother had not overrated the girl's ability. In addition to the breeding and education of a gentlewoman, she had all the gifts requisite for her art. A magnificent physique, a wonderful voice, an emotional temperament, vivid imagination, acute sensibility, poetic fancy, a quick study, the natural instinct of

rhythm, both of voice and motion, combined with industry, application, sincerity, earnestness, and power. Obviously time and opportunity were only needed to enable her to develop into a great actress.

By degrees, and with admirable tact, Fairfax advanced her step by step, until she had almost reached the topmost rung of the ladder. His perfect mastery of the grammar of the stage rendered him an invaluable preceptor, and she was an apt pupil.

Then her youth, her beauty (for she had ripened into a woman of surpassing loveliness), and her accomplishments combined not only to make her a valuable acquisition to the company, but a great popular favourite; indeed, she had already become the most successful leading lady known in the circuit since the days of the Siddons and the Jordan.

Her attraction was perhaps enhanced by her inaccessibility. No Infanta of Spain was ever more jealously guarded.

Her studies were all-engrossing, and when it is remembered that from night to night, she roamed from Lady Teazle to Lady Macbeth, from Beatrice to Rosalind, from Portia to Parthenia, it will be obvious that she had little leisure. Fairfax's society (of which she had a monopoly) was enough for her; then, besides the fascination of her beloved art, she had her books and her music.

In the theatre she was affable and complaisant, but not particularly cordial; indeed, the young men of the company complained that she was particularly cold. Notwithstanding her frigidity, they admired her—much as stars and comets are admired—at a distance.

Certain it was, that as yet no one had made the

slightest impression on that virgin heart ; as yet the steel had not been forged to strike fire from that beautiful but invulnerable bosom. The fuel was there, certainly—combustible enough, and needing but the Promethean spark to leap into life and burst into a flame ; but as yet the hour and the man had not come.

Now, were I a woman, I could devote a chapter, or a series of chapters, to a diagnosis of this innocent young creature's hopes, fears, and aspirations, while as yet she moved "in maiden meditation, fancy free," but I have a queer old-fashioned notion that a young maid's heart is too sacred a thing to be laid on a dissecting table and exposed to the public view ; besides which, and apart from the fact that I am not versed in the mysteries of the feminine mind, this is a story of incident, and not a psychological study of character. I can only therefore chronicle the fact that, up to this moment, Clara Trevor was heart-whole, that her soul was as transparently pure as her body was beautiful, that she was as cold as an icicle, and chaste as sweet Artemis herself.

For all that, the invincible Prince was coming from "over the hills, and far away." Yes ! Eros, the omnipotent, was coming to claim his own and this was how he made his appearance.

The arrangements of the Circuit took the company from town to town—sometimes for a few nights, sometimes for a season. In those days important London combinations were not wont to travel, and wherever the Great Northern Company went their visit was the event of the year ; indeed, they were always sure of a cordial welcome, both in the theatre and in society.

At the time about to be described they had returned

to Rosemount for the winter season. The —th Lancers was a theatrical regiment. The officers dined early, came to the theatre nightly, and behaved, I am glad to say this, like gentlemen, for I am constrained to admit with regret that at that period the good breeding of the gallant defenders of their Queen and country was not the quality most conspicuous during their visits to the boxes of a country theatre, or for that matter to any other place of public resort.

Fairfax was fond of hunting; he was a capital horseman, and a welcome guest at every hunt breakfast, and at many a pleasant dinner afterwards. Clara was not only an accomplished horsewoman, but had become one of the most attractive features of every hunting field in the county.

Now, it so happened that one morning, blessed with "a southerly wind and a cloudy sky," the manager and his ward put in an appearance together at the Marquis of H—'s meet.

Leaving Clara outside the Castle, attended by the groom, Fairfax went into the breakfast-room to fetch her a cup of tea. As he was returning, whom should he encounter but the Marquis himself. He had been Lord Chamberlain, and had seen Frank act all his crack parts in town. The old gentleman accosted him with a cheery "good morning," and then inquired—

"Where are you off to, Fairfax, with that cup of tea?"

"It's for my daughter, sir!"

"Nonsense! can't allow it; pray introduce me to Miss Trevor, and let me take her in to my wife and daughters."

The introduction was made, and then the genial old gentleman said, "Come, Miss Trevor—

" 'Though grey
Do something mingle with our younger brown, yet ha' we
A brain that nourishes our nerves.' "

Just place your little hands on my shoulders, and I'll lift you from your saddle like a bird. Allow me!" and down she sprang with a joyous laugh.

"That's right," he continued; "now let's leave this dissipated young dog to his weed with the men yonder, while we have a cup of tea with my lady and the girls."

In due course Clara was introduced to the Marchioness and her daughters, Florence and Mary (two graceful and unaffected young ladies), who were as delighted with her as she was with them.

Presently the girls rode out together, greatly to the mortification of certain young gentlemen who aspired to be their several escorts.

All the officers of the —th were there in full force. Two of these young fellows were distinguished beyond all the rest by their thoroughly good form, as well as by their good looks, and they sat their horses as if they had been born on their backs.

One of them had dark brown curling hair flecked with gold, an oval face, and deep blue eyes; he was broad-chested, slender-loined, and tiger-backed. The other was slighter, fairer, with sunny hair and laughing hazel eyes. Neither of them could have been less than twenty-one or more than five-and-twenty. When they saw the ladies the young men took off their hats and bowed. The girls, except Clara (who remained immovable), blushed and bowed again.

The darker of the two men looked at her for a moment: their eyes met; she flushed. He bent to the saddle bow as he instinctively lifted his hat and gave his horse the spur. Florence looked rather astonished at this pantomime, and inquired—

“Do you know those gentlemen?”

“No, I do not,” responded Clara.

“H’m,” replied the girl, rather dubiously; “they are people of good family, though at present they are only ensigns in the Lancers quartered at Rosemount.”

“By-the-bye, they are great play-goers. Talking at dinner the other day about you and Mr. Fairfax, they said they were delighted with your ‘Beatrice’ and charmed with his ‘Benedict.’ The fair boy, Mr. Armitage, admires you especially.”

“Oh! indeed! and the other—the one with the dark hair?”

“Oh! his name is Herbert, but the men never call him by that name.”

“Indeed!”

“No; papa says they always call him”—and she hesitated a little—“‘Handsome Jack.’”

“Handsome Jack!” echoed Clara.

“Yes; don’t you think him handsome?” both the girls inquired.

“No, I don’t,” said Clara, very decidedly.

The conversation terminated abruptly, for the sly puss gave her horse the heel and sent him caracoling round.

After this the girls were all a little *géné*. There’s nothing, however, like the sound of horse and hound to “drive dull care away.” Their youth, high spirits, the fine weather, the sound of the huntsman’s horn,

the crack of the whip, the baying of the hounds, and the cry of "Tally-ho! hark forward! tantivy!" set their blood flowing like quicksilver; so, giving their horses their heads, off they went with a burst, helter-skelter after the hounds.

Nothing stopped these young Amazons. The men were all good horsemen, but considerations of courtesy induced them to yield the lead to the ladies.

It was a pleasant, quick run for everybody, even for the fox, for he was run to cover, and they lost scent in less than three hours. Clara, for one, was glad that poor Reynard had escaped.

Returning from the hunt with her young friends, she found that they had read "Romeo and Juliet," and had got the Bard upon the brain.

Some charades and amateur performances had been given at the Castle, and among other selections the ball-room and the balcony scenes from "Romeo and Juliet" were presented. Florence had played Juliet, Mary, the Nurse; "Handsome Jack," as he was called, and his friend Armitage had played Romeo and Mercutio—and played them divinely—so at least the girls said.

On the other side of the field the two young men, having got the Marquis to introduce them, had declared to Fairfax that they also were "death" on Romeo and Mercutio.

"We oft rub shoulders with Fate as she hurries past," and thus the meet at H— Castle affected the lives of all those more or less connected with this veracious history.

As for Lady Florence and Lady Mary, in the fulness of time, the one became a countess, the other a mar-

chioness; and I am under the impression they also became mothers of a race of earls and marquises and other such superior people.

It is more than likely, however, if Jack Herbert or Harry Armitage had had the pluck to pop the question that morning, the future peeresses would have chanced "the life to come" for the sake of becoming in the present Lady Florence Herbert and Lady Mary Armitage, in which case this story would have remained untold.

Whatever amount of courage the lads possessed, they evidently had not the inclination to try the experiment just then, for they rode back towards Rosemount with Fairfax, who, on Clara's approach, introduced them both to her.

The young fellows were most deferential and ingratiating, and endeavoured to render themselves particularly agreeable to the young lady, but she was very cold and reserved, and kept close to Fairfax's side. Perhaps he was not displeased at this, for he wanted to keep his darling to himself as long as he could.

When they reached the little house at the theatre, the groom came to help Clara dismount, but Herbert anticipated him, and was by her side like a flash of lightning.

Before she knew how it was done, her hands were on his shoulders, his arms were around her waist, and a strange thrill went coursing through her every vein.

As she alighted they looked once more full in each other's eyes. He lifted his hat, she bowed in return, then lifting her habit she rapidly entered the house.

Fairfax was, at that moment, occupied with Armitage

making an engagement to dine at the mess the following week. Herbert remounted; the gentlemen shook hands and parted with mutual expressions of good-will.

As they rode away Armitage said—

“What do you think of her, Jack?”

“I think she rides to hounds capitally, is a charming actress, and altogether about the most beautiful girl I ever saw.”

“Ah! well, that’s good enough.”

“Good enough for what?” said Herbert curtly, and even sternly.

“Why, for Mrs. Herbert.”

“Quite, if she saw it and I saw it from that point of view, but I don’t suppose she does. Fairfax is wealthy—she is his heiress—besides which she’s bound to make her fortune on the stage, while I—well! I’m too poor and too proud to live upon my wife. Don’t you remember the story of the singing woman who married a marquis—a miserable creature. After paying his gambling debts half a dozen times she divorced him. Plucking a diamond necklace, worth a king’s ransom, from her neck, she threw it in the fellow’s face, as she said, ‘Take that! For that and the like of it you sold yourself to slavery; with it I buy my liberty. Begone! *Lâche!*’

“Just imagine any woman ever having the chance of saying that or anything like it to Jack Herbert! Enough. Say no more about it, Hal,” and they set spurs to their horses.

And Clara?

She was unusually quiet at dinner, and though she piled Fairfax’s plate with dainties, scarcely tasted food herself.

“What’s the matter, my darling?” he inquired, as he came and placed his arms tenderly around her.

Ah! his gentle caresses did not send the hot blood to her heart like yonder man’s simple touch.

She merely murmured languidly—

“Nothing, papa! only I’m rather tired, and my head aches a little, that’s all. If you don’t mind I’ll lie down for an hour or two. I shall be better by-and-bye,” and so she left him to his *Times*, his claret, and his after-dinner cigar.

Poor girl! “The very pin of her heart was cleft with the blind bow-boy’s butt shaft.”

When she looked into John Herbert’s eyes, quick and fleeting as was the glance, she saw her fate lay mirrored there.

Her hour had come—the hour which comes to every maid and every man, sooner or later.

CHAPTER II.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

“For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”

A FORTNIGHT after the meet at H— orders came down from the Horse Guards for the —th Lancers to put themselves in marching order and to be prepared to start at a week's notice for Egypt.

Then came a succession of farewell dinners and dances. To give additional *éclat* to the occasion, Herbert and Armitage induced Fairfax to let them have the theatre for an amateur performance of “Romeo and Juliet” by the men of the regiment.

Now, this affair nearly came to grief through the unexpected and apparently inexplicable absence from the rehearsal of the chaplain of the regiment, the Honourable and Reverend Philip Blake, of Castle Blake, County Galway, commonly called “Fighting Phil.”

Dear old Phil was as fine a fellow as ever stood in shoe-leather (and he stood six feet without his shoes), but he ought to have been a barrister, a soldier, an actor—anything but a parson.

He was dying to distinguish himself as Friar Lawrence.

Barring the brogue, he spoke the lines admirably,

and had a fair idea of the part, thanks to the capital coaching of Joe Boanergus, Fairfax's "heavy man," who came to look after the preliminary rehearsals.

Altogether a remarkable person was Joe, with his bullet-head, his black hair cropped to the poll, his keen, glittering eyes, his pale face, his close-shaven blue-black beard, and his mouth with the teeth of a badger and the jaw of a bulldog. A heavy swell, too, was he, in his stylish great coat with sealskin collar and cuffs, his white silk muffler tied carelessly round his neck, his cloth boots tipped with patent leather, his malacca cane, silver-topped, his kid gloves, and his hat curled up at the brim.

"Fighting Phil" didn't come to the second rehearsal, whereupon Joe kicked up a row and dismissed the people.

That afternoon "Phil" turned up at the theatre house, and was shown into the manager's den, where presently Frank Fairfax joined him.

Frank went in "like a lion," but after five minutes' chat, came out "like a lamb."

The parson stayed to dinner, and assisted in spoiling a leg of Welsh mutton, and also assisted in polishing off a couple of bottles of Fairfax's famous old port, before he returned to quarters.

Next day Boanergus rehearsed the Friar himself, so that difficulty was got over.

It was a crying grievance to Phil, however, that pressure had been brought to bear to induce him to throw up the part.

This was how it happened :—

The Dean (a stupid old gentleman, who was always

interfering with other people's business) got wind, through some of the boys who were dining at the Deanery, of Phil's intention, and thought it desirable to warn Blake of the consequences of such a breach of decorum — consequences which he alleged would be serious, perhaps fatal to his professional advancement.

"Sure, boys," said Phil, "I meant to have put myself behind a magnificent 'bird.' Then, with a bald wig and 'Mr. Anon' in the play-bill, who the deuce would have recognised Phil Blake?"

Clara knew that so long as her secret was her own she was safe; hence to the dove's innocence she added a little of the serpent's wisdom, and when not engaged in the business of the scene she was distantly courteous to Herbert, and no more.

Once on the stage, her eyes, her looks, her tremulous and pathetic utterance of the Veronean maiden's ecstatic but unhappy love were all but too eloquent tell-tales.

Herbert could not understand how it was possible she could grow hot and cold in the same breath; how she could fix her eyes upon him at their first meeting in the ball-room, as if she was spellbound; how she could look down upon him from the balcony as if she were about to leap into his arms or draw him up to hers; how she could cling to him with convulsive ardour at their last fatal parting, and yet, a moment after, could be frigid as an iceberg. Although he couldn't understand these strange phenomena, Fairfax knew the symptoms only too well. Seeing the estrangement increase between the young people, he was actually drawn towards Herbert, who was so modest, so unpretentious, so manly, that at last Frank's heart went out to him. "If they love each other," he

growled to himself, "why, they do, and there's an end of it; but it's a pity such a fine fellow should go to cut a throat or have his own cut for three half-crowns a day when he could do so much better at home."

At length came the eventful night. All the men turned up in a dreadful state of nervousness, and had it not been for Blake I don't know what would have become of them. He buzzed about from dressing-place to dressing-place, laughing and joking here, there, and everywhere. His laughter was contagious, and the boys began to laugh a little themselves. Then he had some tea brought in, and gradually they began to forget, for a moment at least, the very existence of nerves.

"Shure, boys," said he, "I'm here to tache you how to behave yourself to the girls, and especially to look after that thief of a Romeo, who goes about jumping over walls, climbing balconies, and killing people on the slightest provocation.

"By my honour, that friar was a sinsible owld man, and knew what he was about when he said—

"For by your laves you shall not stay alone
'Till holy Church incorporate two in one."

"Besides, who knows but you might be afther mating wid an accident—tumbling down one of the holes in that murdering stage; and then where would you be without the parson?"

"Wherever the regiment is there am I, so long as a rag of the flag hangs together."

Of course, it goes without saying that there was an enormous house. Friends are always willing to come to see fellows make fools of themselves; in fact, it is one of those privileges of which friendship steadfastly

avails itself. But the men of the —th were not such sticks as amateurs usually are ; most of them certainly looked guys in their mediæval costumes, while, as for their riding rods of legs!— It is a singular thing that cavalry officers never have legs ; I suppose it is a qualification for that branch of the service. It is certain, however, there was only one pair of legs in the regiment, and those were Romeo's. Well, as soon as he had made his first plunge, and surmounted his nervousness, he spoke like a Christian, moved like a man and a gentleman ; nay, had some idea of the rhythmical intonation of the verse. He looked a picture ; and his voice—ah ! he always had a voice that went straight to every heart.

Fairfax, who was hard to please, sat in his box holding a post-mortem examination on everything and everybody.

At the end of the Balcony Scene he exclaimed—

“By Jove ! the boy will make an actor.”

And Clara ! Well, it was conceded on all hands that her Juliet was not a transformation—it was a transfiguration ; all hearts went out to her, and she struck the chords of every emotion, whether she melted into pathos, rose to passion, or sank into despair.

Herbert could never surely have escaped the universal contagion had not his poverty and his pride rendered him invulnerable. “In the very torrent and tempest” of his passion—even while they were both quivering in the ecstasy of simulated love—each felt an insuperable barrier of pride arise like a pillar of ice between them.

When the curtain fell and they came forth to receive the congratulations of their friends, amidst the flowers

at their feet lay a golden laurel wreath, which Romeo lifted from the stage and placed upon Juliet's head.

Could he or she, amidst that whirlwind of excitement, have caught a glimpse of the pale, anguished face of poor little Lady Florence, who had prepared the wreath for him, and now saw "her Romeo" place it on the head of her rival, Juliet, it would surely have a little dashed their triumph.

As they left the stage, Herbert said—

"Good-bye, Miss Trevor ; thanks, a thousand and a thousand times, for your endurance of my crude efforts. With such a Juliet to inspire me I ought to have done better ; believe, however, I have done my best. Now, once more thanks, and farewell."

He pressed her hand, and was gone ere she could speak.

For a moment she was silent, then, waking as if from a dream, she turned wearily towards her dressing-room, murmuring to herself the lines she had heard him speak the moment immediately preceding her first entrance. The words are not Shakespere's but Garrick's, yet, despite the cant of the purists, they are quite good enough to be the poet's own : 'tis thus they run :—

" 'Twas through my eyes the shaft empierced my heart,
Chance gave the wound which time can never heal.
No star befriends me.
To each sad night succeeds a dismal morrow,
And still 'tis hopeless love and endless sorrow."

Poor Clara ! that was the burden of her song for many a weary day and many a sleepless night to come.

CHAPTER III.

"THE GIRLS THEY LEFT BEHIND THEM."

"Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye."

WHEN Phil Blake and his young friends got to town he joined his family in Kennington Park Terrace, while Armitage went to his father's house at South Kensington, and Herbert put up at the Hummums.

The day after their arrival Hal asked his comrades to dinner at Hollywood Lodge.

The boy's mother was dead ; his father, an Alderman of the city of London, a wealthy merchant, and an M.P. to boot, was a blatant, purse-proud, well-meaning old Philistine, with not one aspiration in common with his son.

Both Phil and Herbert tried to make themselves agreeable, but despite the sumptuous repast the attempt was a failure. They made no secret of their poverty, and the Alderman boasted continually of his wealth. He opened fire by suggesting that they should make the most of the spread and the wine.

"Tuck in, my lads," said he ; "you don't get a feed like this every day."

Phil flushed up to his eyes, and gasped, but ultimately gulped down his indignation with a glass of Madeira. Herbert was rather amused, but poor Hal

with difficulty restrained his annoyance and mortification.

"I dessay you wouldn't think it," said the Alderman, "but that salmon cost me five shillings a pound!"

"In that case I'll trouble you for another half-pound," said Phil, gravely.

"Is that the way you eat salmon in Ireland?" inquired the Alderman.

"No, sir; we eat herrings there, and give the salmon to the peasants and the pigs!"

"Sir-er!" exclaimed the Alderman.

"Beg pardon. When I spoke of pigs I didn't mean to be personal," said Blake.

Herbert nearly barked Phil's shins under the table, and he "dried up" for a time. Meanwhile poor Hal thought—

"If they've got to this with the fish what will it be by-and-bye?"

When they reached the dessert the Alderman was more blatant than ever, but Phil kept pace with his host, and never flinched from his bottle until they were both well under weigh.

Meanwhile the two young men sat on thorns, and while the elders were pegging away at the port they stuck to the claret.

"That's Château Margaux, my boys," said the Alderman. "A guinea and a half a bottle. You're not likely to get much of that in Egypt. Have another glass of port, parson? It's better than the black strap you get at your mess, I'll be bound. What do you think of it?"

"H'm! Pretty good for Kensington," said Blake, "but not what we are accustomed to in Galway."

"Galway be d—d! Poor poverty-stricken, priest-ridden country, where the people live on 'potatoes and point,' and not much of that. That port, sir, cost me thirty-six pounds a dozen—that's sixty shillings a bottle. Sixty shillings, sir; think of that!"

"Ah!" said Blake reflectively, "let me see. Twelve glasses to the bottle. Pass the decanter, Alderman, and I'll take another crown's worth."

"Parson," said the Alderman, "it strikes me very forcibly you wouldn't put it down so easily if you had to pay for it."

"It strikes me very forcibly," replied Phil, "I should put it down much easier, for I shouldn't have an Alderman of the City of London to take the trouble to keep count of the number of glasses I take."

"Counting, sir," roared the Alderman. "Counting is my business. I've made that boy's fortune by counting. I'll bet you a thousand pounds to a shilling that I count more thousands of pounds than you can count sovereigns!"

"I can't undertake to do that," responded the parson with grim pleasantry, "because I've only got one in the world; but I'll bet you a sovereign to a ten-penny nail that I put down a sovereign for every idea you've got in your head, Mr. Armitage," and he laid the sovereign down on the table.

"Tell 'ee what it is, young jackanapes," growled the Alderman to Hal, "if you've brought these fellows here only to insult your father, the sooner they are out of this the better."

So saying he staggered over to the bell, and when the butler came he said—

"'Awkins, you can show these gents the other side

of the door ; and that puppy of mine can go with 'em if he likes."

Out went the guests without further ceremony. When they got outside Herbert said—

"Phil! how could you? Only see what you have let poor Hal in for."

"By my honour I'm sorry that I forgot myself, for your sake, dear boy, for whatever your father is you're a gentleman; but you see, I'm a Blake of Galway, and I'm not accustomed to take a blow without giving a thrust.

"Come and dine with me, boys, before we leave town. I can't give you port at sixty bob a bottle, but I'll give you a leg of Welsh mutton, a glass of claret, a jug of punch, and a *cead mihlle fealtha*, and I'll introduce you to the best wife and daughter in the world. Now mind, the day after to-morrow, six o'clock sharp, 59, Kennington Park Terrace. That's an appointment."

So the friends shook hands and parted, leaving poor Hal to confront the Alderman's wrath. Fortunately, when the boy got back, the stern parent had returned to his potations with such a will that he was quite oblivious and had to be helped to bed, and was conscious the next morning of nothing worse than a headache, and an indistinct recollection of having had a slight difference of opinion with Hal's friends.

Next day Herbert went down to Cambridge, where he found his father broken down by chronic bronchitis. The flat, marshy neighbourhood of the dear old place, which was associated with the lad's happiest days, had aggravated the malady, and winter after winter the poor gentleman got worse.

Mrs. Herbert, a charming old lady, took the first opportunity, when they were alone, to tell Jack that she thought his father was getting near the end of his journey. The doctor who came to dine with them had known Herbert from boyhood, and as they walked to the "Bull" together, after dinner, said to him—

"Jack, I'm afraid it's a bad look out for the pater. We shall have an unusually severe winter, and if he doesn't get away to Cannes, or Nice, or somewhere in the Riviera, he's a doomed man."

Happily the poor gentleman himself had no idea that the end was so near. So when they parted he was elate, and confident, and full of plans for the future. Not so Herbert and his mother.

"John," said she, "be careful of your precious life. I fear soon you will be all I shall have left in the world."

"Mother," he replied, "heaven will protect me for your sake. You'll let me know, dear, if the worst should happen?"

"Be sure of that. God bless you, my boy," and so they parted.

On his return to the Hummums, Herbert found a note from Phil Blake, reminding him of their appointment; and before six o'clock Harry Armitage called and bowled him down to Kennington in the Alderman's brougham.

Phil, who was usually rather careless in his costume, was on this occasion "got up regardless," more, it must be said, in honour of his womenkind than his young comrades. He came forward with a genial welcome, and after a minute's chat he said—

"Now, boys, let me introduce you to my wife and

daughter—here they are,” and the two ladies entered the room.

“Gabrielle, my dear—Caroline, my love,” said he, “let me introduce to you my dearest friends, John Herbert and Harry Armitage.”

Mrs. Blake and her daughter came forward, and without fuss or the pretence of ceremony, made the young fellows welcome, and in five minutes they were at home.

The two ladies appeared to be younger and elder sister—no more.

The younger was evidently about eighteen ; the elder did not look a day more than thirty, though obviously she must have been a little older to be the mother of such a daughter.

They had just returned from Paris, where they had lived for the past two years. Both were dressed exactly alike, in simple gowns of purple cashmere, high to the throat, falling closely to the figure, merely relieved by a plain white collar and cuffs, and a single band of ribbon, with a dainty little gold buckle at the waist, and a small enamelled brooch at the throat. Each had one rich crimson rose placed amidst the abundant tresses, which coiled closely to the head, and were fastened in a Grecian knot behind.

Although their features were cast in the same mould, they were as different as day and night in complexion. Madame’s hair was of a rich reddish bronze ; Caroline’s was like her father’s, black as night, or rather of the transparent blue black which takes so many shades in the sunlight.

The mother’s head and face were pure Greek—low brow, straight eyebrows, grey eyes, oval face, short

lips, beautiful teeth, with the bloom of the peach upon her cheeks, and the slightest suspicion of its down upon her lip.

Caroline inherited all the beauty of her mother, commingled with the rich Iberian blood of the Blakes. Wonderful eyes of Irish grey, with great long curled lashes, a skin transparent as alabaster, beneath which the colour came and went as the golden sunshine flickers through the clouds on a September morning.

Mrs. Blake was a woman of remarkable accomplishments, an admirable musician, both vocal and instrumental, a wonderful linguist, an expert needlewoman, and a charming artist in water-colours.

To all her mother's gifts Caroline added strong dramatic instincts, a taste fostered by her Parisian friends, who, after the fashion of their country, went to the play almost nightly, taking the girl and her mother with them. Two or three nights every week they went to the Français, and thus became familiarized not only with the best French dramatic literature and the admirable acting of the accomplished comedians of the "House of Molière," but more especially with the performances of the distinguished actress whose star was then at its zenith.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the girl devoured every detail of the performance of "Romeo and Juliet," which was related at length by Armitage for the delectation of her mother and herself, listening with especial interest to Hal's description of "the beautiful Miss Trevor."

Once she asked Herbert—"Do you think her beautiful, Mr. Herbert?"

Herbert replied—"Beauty is a matter of taste,

Miss Blake. Miss Trevor is certainly very beautiful, but I think I have seen someone who more thoroughly realizes my idea of beauty."

At this moment, with the ready tact of a mother, and an Irishwoman, Mrs. Blake changed the subject; she proposed some music, and they adjourned to the piano. Hal thought he had never heard such music in his life. Madame's voice, which was a ripe mezzo-soprano, paled before her daughter's, which had a wonderful range, being especially rich in the lower notes.

Caroline sang to Madame's accompaniment, Madame sang to hers, then they sang and played together. They sang Moore's melodies, they sang chansonettes and arias, and then, to the astonishment of the young men, Caroline produced her violin, on which she played a fantasia on "The Last Rose of Summer" with a fervour and feeling which enchanted them.

Phil cut in and said—"Now, boys, I'll let you have an Irish song that'll go with the punch. Gabrielle, my darling, give us the 'Cruiskeen Lawn';" and he sang it with a life and go that was irresistible. Hal contributed his mite with the last music hall absurdity, which set everybody off laughing.

Then Phil called on Herbert, who tried to excuse himself. "I only know one ballad," he said, "and as unfortunately I cannot play my own accompaniment, 'tis useless for me to try it."

"Ah, g'long—you good men are so modest; sure Sims Reeves isn't in it with you. And haven't I accompanied you in it a thousand times? So look out, bright chanticleer—here goes!" And he struck up "Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye," while Herbert, in a rich baritone, sang the simple and touching melody.

The pleasantest evening must come to an end, so at last the young fellows bade their friends good-night, having arranged to meet at the Lyceum the following evening.

When they were seated in the brougham Hal said—

"Isn't she an angel, Jack?"

"She is charming."

"Charming! She's the most beautiful creature on the face of the earth; and if ever I live to come back—"

"Well, if ever you do?"

"You'll see."

"That's right, old man. Now give us a light."

Then they subsided into silence until Hal dropped Jack at "The Hummums."

The following evening the lads met Phil and the ladies at the Lyceum. The play was "Much Ado About Nothing," a sumptuous spectacle which they followed with eager interest.

Phil sat in the centre, with Mrs. Blake on his left hand and Caroline on his right. Hal was next to Caroline, and did his utmost to make himself agreeable, but evidently without much success, for the young lady replied only in monosyllables, and appeared very *distracted*. Herbert was next to Mrs. Blake, who rattled away at every interval with all the charm and vivacity of her race; but, strange to say, Herbert was not particularly responsive, so Phil, Mrs. Blake, and Hal had the burden of the talk to themselves.

When the performance was over, Phil and the ladies returned to Kennington, and Herbert and Hal strolled over to E.'s to have some supper, and there, I fear, they had more wine than was good for them.

Hal was effusive and confidential. He had been to see Phil that morning, and had obtained permission (provided he could obtain his father's consent) to pay his addresses to Miss Blake on his return from Egypt, but it was understood that the matter was to remain in abeyance until then.

Herbert received this communication almost in silence. He merely said—

“I hope you will be happy, Hal. If she loves you, you are sure to be happy.”

“If she loves me? She's bound to love me, Jack. There's no other fellow in the way—if there were, by —! I'd shoot him. And if the governor isn't a swell, he'll cut up for half a million; and I'm not such a bad sort, you know.”

“Say no more, old fellow, say no more; and let us hope it'll all turn out as you wish.”

“That's right, Jack; you're the best fellow in the world, and I hope you'll be happy with Clara Trevor one of these fine days.”

“I don't think that is likely,” coldly replied Herbert.

At this moment a choir of boys struck up an old madrigal; it was one that Herbert's mother had sung to him as a child. Apart from this, it was a strain of heavenly music, and melted their hearts into tenderness and love. They hugged each other—for they were only lads; then they cried and swore eternal friendship.

Next morning a vast concourse of people assembled on Waterloo Bridge, and crowded the road down to the station gates to see the troops march past on their way to Portsmouth.

The sun was high in heaven, banners waving, band playing, and the crowd shouting.

When Herbert and Armitage, at the head of their detachment, reached the Surrey side of the bridge a well-known voice rang out above the rest—

"More power to ye, boys ; till Portsmouth, good-bye !"

Looking to the right they saw Phil, Mrs. Blake, and Caroline standing in the balcony of one of the first houses on the terrace. They saluted, and the ladies waved their handkerchiefs. A mist of tears clouded bright eyes and welled forth from brave hearts, while high above the din the noon-tide hour rang out from St. Paul's, and from every church tower the silvery chimes made joyous answer.

The band struck up "The girl I left behind me ;" and amidst the waving of hats and handkerchiefs, the roar of the multitude, the braying of the band, and the clangour of the bells, Herbert and Armitage passed forth to their last campaign.

BOOK THE SECOND.

ROBERT PENARVON'S NARRATIVE.

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CHAPTER I.

ORESTES AND PYLADES (A RETROSPECT).

“Oh! Pylades, what is life without a friend?”

I, ROBERT PENARVON, who tell this story, will say as little about myself or my antecedents as possible, save to indicate my connection with the incidents hereafter related.

Of course everybody knows the Penarvons, of Penarvon Grange, Cornwall.

I was called Robert, after my grandfather, who I have heard was a cranky, crusty, cruel old man.

His eldest son, Roland, my father, was a captain in the East India Company's service, and when he was home on leave, after a long spell in the East, he ran away with the daughter of one of my grandfather's tenants, and married her.

Grandfather would have forgiven father for running away with my mother, but for making her his wife he was never forgiven.

The property was not entailed, so the whole estate, real and personal, was bequeathed to father's younger brother, Stephen, who, after grandfather's death, married the cook, by whom he had a numerous family of clodhoppers, and that is all I know, or ever cared to learn, about them or theirs.

I was born in India, and my poor mother died the moment I saw the light. My father, stricken with a mortal malady, sold out, and returned to England.

In the course of time he put me to school at Clapham, where he took up his quarters, that he might see me as often as possible.

For the first two years he came for me regularly every Wednesday afternoon, and we used to take long rambles together over the beautiful heaths and moorlands in the neighbourhood, then uninvasioned by jerry builders and railways.

Every Sunday, after midday, I was father's own boy until Monday morning.

Poor father! he was ill—very ill.

At last he was taken from me, and at twelve years of age I was left alone in the world. I was always shy, awkward, and taciturn, but I became more so than ever after father's death, and the bigger fellows were disposed to "put" on the "nigger," as they called me, because of my dark complexion and my being born in India.

Jim Bulstrode, a great hulking hobbledehoy, was the cock of the school, and he used to order us about like galley-slaves. Woe betide anyone who dared dispute his commands; it was a word and a blow, only, unfortunately for us little ones, the blow came first and the word after. There was only one lad in the school to whom Bulstrode gave a wide berth, a lad of about fifteen, who had only just joined us. He was very bright, very handsome, and very clever, but very proud and distant with us all. I think I can see him now, with his beautiful oval face, his open but imperious brow, crowned with clusters of dark brown curls,

his dark eyebrows and long curled lashes veiling his great, dreamy, deep blue eyes; his straight, delicately-chiselled nose, his dimpled chin, and his firm-set mouth. A month after his arrival he stood at the head of the first class in every department.

M. Anatole de la Forge, our old French dancing master, who pronounced me an *imbecile*, declared that the new-comer danced like young Sylvian; while Sergeant Gribble, our old sword master, who had served in the Crimea, swore that his calisthenics were first-rate, that his broad-sword play was worthy of a Life Guardsman; and that in the grand salute and lightness of touch with the foils he was equal to Angelo, or Charles Kean, the play-actor, whom Gribble had once seen at the Princess's.

All this high falutin stuff would have turned an ordinary lad's head, but it fell like water off a duck's back from the young stranger.

How or where he learnt his lessons we never knew.

As a rule, during play time, he retired to some secluded corner and occupied himself with a pocket edition of Shakespeare, or Pope's Homer, which were his inseparable companions morning, noon, and night.

He seldom played with us, but when he did we found to our cost that he was the best cricketer, jumper, swimmer, and runner amongst us.

Besides these accomplishments he was master of another, of which we knew nothing till a certain memorable occasion, when he enlightened Bulstrode and the rest of us—more particularly Bulstrode.

The stranger's name was John Herbert, but no one ever took the liberty to accost him by his Christian name out of school. All the boys, except Bulstrode,

called him "The Prince;" he called him "The Cub"—not to his face though.

One night, after we had gone to bed, our tyrant routed me up, and ordered me to go and steal some King William pears, which grew in the garden beneath our window.

I fear I was not so loth to commit this petty larceny as I ought to have been. So when they lowered me by a sheet I went to work with a will, clambered up the tree, had a jolly tuck in on my own account before I descended with as many pears as I could carry in a pillow case.

When I began the job the moon shone as bright as noontide; before I had finished it was dark as pitch.

I alighted on *terra firma* safely enough, but I couldn't find the window, and went blundering about in the dark, until I fell head foremost into a cucumber frame, smashing the glass in every direction, breaking my nose, cutting my hands, and making a most diabolical row, which startled the whole house.

Cries of "Murder!" "Thieves!" &c., arose in every direction, and before I could extricate myself from the cucumbers, the Doctor's bull terrier, Pongo, had pinned me by my breeches, and when Joe, the gardener, pulled him off, the brute brought away something more than the seat of my trousers, I can tell you.

When I regained my feet I was confronted by the Doctor, with a blunderbuss as big as himself, the ushers with their rattans, the servants with lights.

Now these pears were the Doctor's especial weakness.

It was rumoured that when they appeared at dessert, neither Mrs. Thorpe nor the Misses Thorpe, not even Aurelia, his especial favourite, ever presumed to look at

them. When, therefore, he found that I had dared to lay felonious hands upon his treasures, his rage knew no bounds. The old brute offered to let me off if I would peach on my pals. Of course, an infamy like that was not to be thought of, so I was tried and convicted without benefit of jury, and there and then horsed upon Joseph's back twice up and down the dormitory for the delectation of my brother culprits. Horsed did I say? I was almost flayed alive!

Next day we all had "tasks" (I have hated the name of Virgil ever since), and there was plenty of "clapper clawing" knocking about during those tasks, I promise you.

I soon learned the difference between success and failure. Had I succeeded in bringing back the pears in triumph I should have been a hero; having failed, I was a duffer. No word was bad enough for me.

"The Prince" didn't "chum" in the same dormitory with us, and he tried to pump me as to what had happened, but I wouldn't split, so he became more cold even than usual.

The next Wednesday, during our half-holiday, a council of war was held in the playground, and as a penance for my past offence Bulstrode ordered me to attempt the pear-tree again that very night. On my venturing to demur he threatened to thrash me within an inch of my life, and the beast was as good as his word, for he gave me a clout on the head which sent me to the other side of the yard. I was staggered for a moment, but recovering myself I rushed at him and did my little utmost to give as good as I took. I might as well have stood up against Jack Heenan or Tom Sayers. The fellow hit me wherever he liked. I was

knocked about like a shuttlecock, and bruised and beaten into a jelly bag; in fact, I was nearly done for, when help came from an unexpected quarter.

"The Prince," who was reading his everlasting Shakespere and munching an orange at the other end of the playground, lounged leisurely up to the spot, and said quietly but imperiously—

"Take your hands from the boy. Do you hear?"

Bulstrode opened his eyes in amazement.

"Were you speaking to me, you impudent cub?" he inquired.

"Yes, I was speaking to you," responded "The Prince;" "and what is more, Mr. Jowls, if you give me any of your lip I'll give you the soundest beating you ever had in your life."

With a howl of rage Bulstrode "went" for "The Prince," who, dexterously avoiding the blow, gave Master Jim a crack in the eye with the orange. Then, with the utmost composure, pocketing his Shakespere, he took off his jacket, and turned up his shirt-sleeves. These precautions completed, he said with the utmost *sang froid*—

"Now, Master Jowls, I am going to astonish you," and he did astonish him and everybody else.

Boxing was the shining light this modest young gentleman had kept hidden under a bushel. His "science" was perfect, and I quite forgot my own licking in my admiration of the charmingly scientific manner in which he gave Bulstrode his "gruel."

After about ten minutes of it that gentleman threw up the sponge ignominiously, and left "The Prince" cock of the walk. Then, while the discomfited bully made the best of his way with a beautiful pair of black,

eyes to the pump, the boys carried the victor in triumph round the playground.

What marvel after this that Jack Herbert and I were friends and brothers!

Although barely three years older than myself, I looked up to him as my protector, and somehow he seemed to take the place of the father I had lost.

In his moments of confidence he informed me that he, like myself, was intended for the army, and that his father was a college tutor at Cambridge, poor as Job, and proud as Lucifer, and that poverty and pride ran in the blood of the Herberts.

For my part I hadn't much to boast of in the way of wealth; my small inheritance had, however, been judiciously invested by Mr. Stanton, our solicitor, to whom my father's affairs were confided, and who consented to act as trustee and executor.

Like myself, Jack had little taste for the military profession. Just before he came to Clapham he had been taken to see Phelps at Drury Lane; his *idée fixe* was to be an actor, a tragedian, but since his father would have none of it, and as he believed thoroughly in the Fifth Commandment, he made up his mind to yield obedience to the paternal wishes.

As soon as he took me under his protecting wing time passed pleasantly enough for me, and, indeed, for the other lads, since thenceforth the bold Bulstrode "let us severely alone."

My only bad times were the holidays, when every boy except myself went home to his friends, and I was left alone, except, indeed, one never-to-be-forgotten Christmas, when Jack took me down to Cambridge with him. It was the bitterest winter known

for years, but it was summer to me, rosy, golden summer.

The following Christmas was our last at Clapham. We were both booked for Sandhurst, where he had to fight my battles as well as his own, which kept him pretty well occupied out of school hours.

After the usual course of "cram" we passed our "exams." in triumph; then, through the influence of one of his father's pupils, on the one hand, and Mr. Stanton on the other, we were drafted, the one into the —th Lancers, the other into the Scots Greys.

Before we left Sandhurst Jack's dramatic proclivities asserted themselves. We had a play, or rather a part of a play—the third act of "Julius Cæsar," in which "The Prince" distinguished himself highly as Marc Antony, and I failed miserably in the "lean and hungry" Cassius.

At last came the time for us to part.

Next to father's death this was the greatest grief of my young life.

When we got to town Jack went one way and I another. It was a sad hour for both.

Our separation extended over a considerable period, during which we corresponded regularly. In all that time we had both been on active service in different parts of the globe.

Five years had elapsed since we parted at Sandhurst, and I was quartered at Sheffield when I received a telegram from Jack asking me if I would like to exchange into his regiment.

As if it were necessary to ask such a question! Of course, I jumped at the idea, and in less than a week

afterwards the transfer was effected, and I was on my way to Portsmouth.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, I may here remark that the principal events I am about to relate occurred mostly under my own eyes; and the connecting links are based upon such authentic information as to induce me to incorporate them bodily with this narrative.

CHAPTER II.

EN ROUTE TO THE EAST.

“What envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder East.”

UPON arriving at Portsmouth I was delighted to find myself once more with the friend of my boyhood—I may say my only friend. Jack was as pleased to see me as I was to see him. He introduced me to his comrades as *his* especial chum, and I made myself at home directly—more particularly with his most intimate friends, Phil Blake and Harry Armitage.

Some two or three days elapsed in getting our stores and horses embarked. The very day after my arrival who should “turn up” at mess but Armitage’s father.

The boy was an only child, and the old man softened at the thought of losing him for a time, perhaps for all time, so he came down and declared on to the Colonel, Herbert, and Phil Blake. At first Phil was cold and even arctic; presently, however, he relented, and then he and the old gentleman became inseparable.

A common tie united them.

Armitage was parting with his boy—Phil was leaving his loved ones behind.

The day before we sailed Mr. Armitage gave a

dinner—a princely banquet—not to us five alone, but to all the regiment, from the men upwards. Even the band, after they had played through our dinner, had a sumptuous spread to themselves, and the band-master, Van Vort, an eccentric little foreigner (I never knew whether he was a Hollander, a Bavarian, or a Belgian, but he was a gentleman, I'm sure), was asked in to wine with us. Bye-and-bye he brought in a strange-looking musical instrument—a zither I think he called it—on which he played all kinds of strange tunes and weird fantasias.

Being, unfortunately, not a musician, I know not how to describe these things. I only know that the little man was a long time torturing and tuning his instrument, that he commenced with a dreamy Hungarian waltz which changed to “Juanita.”

Presently he became as one inspired, his face and form betraying the strong emotion which thrilled his blood and brain, while he poured forth his soul through his finger-tips into the instrument, which throbbed, responsive to his touch, as if it were a human creature endowed with a seraphic voice which rose in a crescendo of heavenly music. The jubilate glided gradually into a pathetic minor, a soft liquid melody, compounded of native land, of home, and inle neuk; of the soft sighing of the west wind; of rain-drops pattering softly on rustling leaves; of great rivers gently gliding to the sea; of plighted troths, of kisses, of blessings and farewells; of sighs, and sobs, and tears—“tears wrung from the depths of a divine despair”—when, lo! at the very moment when this “linked sweetness long drawn out” faded into “a sound so fine that nothing lived ’twixt it and silence,”

it swelled and swelled till it burst forth and filled the air like the last song of some poor dying bird rising to the empyrean and pouring out its heart, in its last agony before the gates of God !

No roaring of the loud-mouthed multitude could ever have rendered such eloquent homage to the genius of the musician as our tears and our silence, amidst which he rose and glided forth pale and speechless as a ghost.

For a while we remained spellbound and entranced, hearing nothing but the beating of our hearts.

We were at length called back to life by the passionate grief of old Armitage, who lay forward upon the table, his head on his arms, sobbing as if his heart were fit to break, while he gasped—"Oh ! my boy ! my boy ! you will never come back to your old father—no ! never, never more !"

Phil Blake and the boys tried to console him ; but it was not until that young scapegrace Hal struck up his stupid nonsense of "Mind you don't wake the baby" that the old boy began to relax.

Then the Colonel gave us "The Gallant Hussar ;" Phil and Jack gave their usual contributions ; the Alderman tried "The jolly old sun," and broke down in the middle of it. Then he undertook to explain "why a lawyer was like a saddle of mutton ;" though I confess the resemblance was about as clear to me after the explanation as it was before. Then we all sang "Rule, Britannia" and "God save the Queen," and so "shut up in measureless content."

Next day when we embarked the Alderman came aboard to say "good-bye."

The leave-taking between him and the two boys

was most touching. As I approached I heard Hal say—

“If anything happens to me, dad, you’ll *do* something for Jack, won’t you?”

The old fellow growled in reply—“Don’t talk d—d nonsense, nothing is going to happen to you. You’ll come back a general, or a captain at least, and Jack will be a major-general. I won’t forget him—make your mind easy about that.” Then seeing me, he said, “Good-bye, Penarvon—you’re the mother of the family—mind you look after these jackanapes, or never look me in the face again.”

As we shook hands the last bell rang, and the Alderman went ashore. He remained on the pier to the last, a conspicuous figure amongst the crowd, waving his handkerchief to us. We gave him a parting cheer as the tug took us in tow; then the poor old man broke down and turned away. Hal broke down, too, and Phil and Herbert led him below.

I suppose you may get used to the climate of Egypt as it is said the eels get accustomed to skinning in time, but we had not time to get acclimatized, and the heat nearly settled us before we came to close quarters with the Arabs, who, to do them justice, fought like devils.

The story of the campaign has been told—better than I can ever hope to tell it.

We were foremost in the midnight march on Kassassin—foremost in the thick of the fray at Tel-el-Kebir, where poor Hal Armitage fell wounded from his horse in the first charge upon the Arab spears. In riding to his rescue Herbert nearly came by his own death, and I was knocked over by a bullet in my ankle. We were all three left for dead upon the field; and, indeed, had

it not been for Phil Blake, who, with the Colonel's consent, organized a detachment at nightfall to seek us out, we must have died before the morrow. When they brought us within the lines Herbert was cold and senseless; it seemed as if every drop of blood had passed out of his body, but he was still alive, and that was all.

As for Hal, it was all over; he had been dead for hours.

His father's grief had been prophetic.

Vain now were all his riches.

All the wealth of the world could not buy back his son.

Alas! the poor old man!

CHAPTER III.

HERBERT'S ORDEAL.

"Anywhere—anywhere out of the world."

HERBERT was sent to hospital at Cairo. The doctors said he had had a miraculous escape—that if the bullets had been fired with the express purpose of avoiding serious injury they could not have been aimed better.

Thanks to his superb constitution he soon rallied, and was sent home with a captain's commission to complete his cure.

Alas ! he returned barely in time to follow his father to the grave, and to find his mother not only penniless but overwhelmed with debt. Having nothing but his pay to depend on for a living for himself and a home for her, his resolve was soon taken. He sold his commission, purchased her a small annuity, and placed her with an old and faithful servant in a charming little cottage overlooking the sea, in her native village of Trépolyia, in the county of Cornwall.

He then came to London, where his first task was to seek Blake and myself.

Small wonder that he could learn nothing of either of us, since I was still lying in hospital, while Phil was invalided and had quitted the service.

Poor Jack's next task was to endeavour to obtain employment. Two or three hours every day were devoted to perusing advertisements, writing letters, and making personal applications.

He applied for the position of chief constable at Stow-in-the Wold—of governor of the prison at Kirkwall. In vain!

He wrote stories of his military experiences, and sent them to the magazines. In vain! They were returned endorsed "Not suitable," or not returned at all.

He heard from his mother every week, but her communications brought only cold comfort. Her health was declining fast.

One Monday morning he missed the usual letter.

Next day there came a telegram from the village doctor—"Your mother is dangerously ill; come immediately."

He had scarcely read the message when he was on his way to the quiet village by the sea. Alas! he arrived too late.

For a time he remained at Trepolyia, dreaming the hours away, dawdling drearily by the coast, or aimlessly mooning over his mother's grave.

One day the good old doctor blurted out, "Mr. Herbert, you had better cut this at once. Go back to London; get to work—work of any kind—or you'll go melancholy mad."

Next day Jack returned to town and again resumed his weary fight with fortune.

From morning till night he was on foot seeking work of any description—here, there, and everywhere. All avenues seemed closed against him—all save one.

It did occur to him many times to write to Fairfax

and ask him if he would take him in any department, but his pride intervened, and he could not bear the thought of meeting Clara Trevor as a dependant.

Too proud to importune former acquaintances, he was gradually drifting down—down in the whirlpool of the great city. At last he took to staying at home all day, and prowling abroad half the night, a prey to morbid fancies—fancies which sometimes lead to madness, despair, and death.

One night he had been moping alone for hours in the semi-darkness of his miserable garret, situate in one of the slums on the Surrey side of the river.

There he sat, looking at the Thames which floated on under the cold moonlight, as placidly as if the wind had never ruffled its surface—as if its ample bosom had “felt no age nor known no sorrow.”

All at once he started up and ejaculated, “One moment, and it would be all over.”

Putting on his hat, he descended the stairs and walked rapidly towards the bridge—“The Bridge of Sighs.”

When he reached a central recess on the right-hand side he paused, and looking down, murmured, “Yes, there at least is peace.”

At this moment the great bell of St. Paul's struck the midnight hour, and he found himself mechanically counting the peals aloud.

Then a strange chord of memory was struck, and vibrated through him.

He remembered as though it were yesterday when he and his comrades marched over that very bridge on their way to Portsmouth, brave in all the panoply of war; horses prancing, banners streaming in the sun-

shine, the band playing "The Girl I left behind me." He remembered, too, the girl he had left behind him. She stood on yonder balcony, waving her handkerchief. Where was she now?

He remembered, too, the very night before they left England, how he and poor Harry Armitage, after the theatre, had gone to E——'s. He recalled the sweet music they had listened to. Poor Hal, he was lying low out yonder in the desert wastes of the Soudan, while he—

"An hour or two will make no difference, and I should like to hear 'That strain again, it had a dying fall,' " he muttered, as he passed from the bridge, over the Strand, by the Lyceum, up Wellington Street, to the left through Russell Street, to the right, under the Piazza, and so on into E——'s.

How strange and changed it all seemed, or was it he who was changed?

The place was crowded with a frivolous mob of men about town. A horse-faced buffoon of the period arrayed in evening dress, was braying out a succession of brutal insults to distinguished statesmen.

By-and-bye, a brazen half-naked lion comique, supposed to be of the feminine gender, informed her hearers in a hoarse voice, "That's how it's done."

After a time there was an exodus of the "swells," then a silence, then—

He was at the very back of the Hall, his arms were moodily folded on his breast, when the boys who sang so divinely two years before struck up the madrigal of "The Mother and her Child." It was the very piece of music he had heard when he and Harry Armitage

had sat there together, the very one his mother used to sing to him when he was a child.

The melody was wafted to him uncontaminated by the smoke and the surroundings, fresh, and pure, and sweet as the summer air.

For a moment the "mother" rose to his eyes, and he was a child again.

Swallowing his tears, he muttered through his teeth, "Well, anyhow there's one comfort; I shall 'make a swan-like end, fading in music.' Let me get away, and have done with it at once." So saying he rose and moved rapidly towards the door.

Was it fate, accident, or the "divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will," that at this moment projected him bodily against Frank Fairfax?

The manager exclaimed, "Herbert! I'm glad to see you, my boy; not hearing of you we thought you were dead and buried months ago."

"No," rejoined Herbert, bitterly, "I live, sir, live, worse luck. But—there—there—I must be off. Good-night."

Fairfax looked at him from head to foot—saw his gaunt features, his great eyes starting out of his head, his long, unkempt hair, his seedy garments, and took stock of the situation in a moment.

With characteristic *bonhomie* he said, "Don't be in such a deuce of a hurry; remember we have not seen each other for two years or more, and have lots to talk about. Nay—nay—I don't mean to let you go so easily. I stay here; always do when I'm in town. I'm a late bird, and haven't supped yet, so you must come and join me." So saying, he took him by the arm,

and led the way through a side door to the adjacent hotel.

In two minutes' time they were installed in the manager's private room, which was as bright as a roaring fire and half-a-dozen wax candles could make it.

The table was laid for supper with all kinds of nice things.

"Here you are, my boy," said Fairfax; "Liberty Hall—every man his own butler." And he proceeded to open a bottle of sparkling wine.

"You are very good," said Herbert, but, really, I can't stay; I have important business."

"Business be blanked," rejoined the other; "business to-morrow, pleasure to-night. I've got you, and here I mean to keep you. Here's to you," he continued, lifting a beaker of Heidseck.

Herbert lifted his glass in response, put it down untasted, and without uttering one word fell back fainting.

"Gracious heaven! what's the matter?" exclaimed Fairfax. "Wake up, wake up, boy." With that he untied Herbert's frayed neckcloth, tore open his soiled and faded shirt (cruel tell-tale), rushed to the adjacent bedroom, brought out a flask of eau-de-Cologne, bathed the poor fellow's temples, sprinkled it over him, and supported his head upon his chest. "Oh! come, I say, Jack," said he, "never say die; it isn't fair to go dying this way. You sha'n't die, d——d if you shall!"

¹ Gradually Herbert opened his eyes, looked round, and seeing Fairfax, says—

"I've been alone a good deal, and I'm not quite myself and—no,¹ no, it isn't that—I've been unused to

and it—I—oh, Fairfax! Fairfax!" then he burst out crying like a girl.

The tears did him good, for he made a clean breast of it, and told Frank everything. Listening in silence, he said—

"It's a lucky thing, my boy, that I met you; you are a deuced good actor, spoiled by being a soldier. Any blockhead can pull a trigger or cut a throat, but it takes brains to make an actor. Look here! I'm beating up for recruits; I'll give you three guineas a week to start with, and when you've rubbed the rust off I'll make an actor of you. Not another word; eat first and talk afterwards. For my part I'm hungry as a hunter, and could eat a horse behind the saddle. Try the fiz; it will set you going. That's right, there you are!" and he piled Herbert's plate and forced him to eat.

It was astonishing the change a hearty supper and a bottle of champagne made in him.

The two men smoked their cigars and had a night-cap each.

Then Fairfax burst out again—

"Make yourself at home here until we start for the north. There! Silence gives consent; off you go to roost. You shall sleep in my crib to-night. Not a word—good-night, God bless you, my boy!" and so they parted.

Herbert, to thank heaven for the pleasant future that was dawning before him, not altogether without thought of Clara, and as to how that proud and imperious beauty (for so she appeared to him) would receive him in his altered circumstances. And so he mused and mused until he fell asleep, and dreamt that he was acting Romeo again to her Juliet, and crowning her with the

CHAPTER IV.

MISS CHALLONER.

"Fate, show thy face; ourselves we do not owe.
What is decreed must be, and be this so!"

JACK slept far into the next day.

When he awoke his threadbare garments had disappeared, and a tolerably extensive wardrobe was spread out all over the room with a change of linen, &c.

He was a little "fogged" by the arrangement, and rang the bell. In a moment Fairfax himself appeared, bringing in a cup of tea, which he made Herbert drink.

"You've taken it out, my boy; it's nearly half-past four," said he. "Now look here, old man," he continued, "we mustn't stand on ceremony; in the first place see if any of these traps of mine will go near you. We'll have an early dinner and go to the play. Tomorrow we'll look up my tailors about your 'togs;' your 'props' I've seen about already. Meanwhile you must let me be your banker. There are £20; if you want any more, say so, and you shall repay me at your convenience. Now not another word. Dinner will be ready in half an hour," and before Jack could reply Fairfax left the room.

By that post he wrote to Clara, telling her of the advent of Herbert, merely stating that he had quitted the army and was about to take to the stage. He

thought the news would please her, and it did. Dormant hope revived ; at least she would see him once more, and then—ah, then !—well, we know that “ Hope springs eternal in the human breast.”

In a few days Fairfax’s arrangements were completed, and he and Jack left town by the night express, getting to Rosemount at two in the morning.

Mrs. Macnamara’s lodgings in St. Dunstan’s Close had been secured for the new recruit, and Fairfax dropped him there on his way to the theatre house.

When he got home Frank had a warmer greeting than he had had for many a day.

Clara was always glad to welcome him, but now she sprang upon him—she caressed and kissed him repeatedly. She hung about him, and cooed. She took off his coat and wrappers. She pulled off his boots, and patted his feet tenderly as she put on his slippers. She had prepared a delicious little supper with her own dainty hands. She fluttered about like a butterfly, but always ended by croodling up to him. He knew what it all meant, though they had not exchanged a single word about it. He merely touched most lightly on the subject nearest her heart, just casually remarking that Herbert proposed calling in the morning to pay his respects.

Once she was about to speak, but the words stuck in her throat. She merely kissed him again, and said “ How good you are ! ” and retired to rest.

Fairfax followed her example, and speedily adjourned to the Ghost Room.

Herbert again slept till late. Nature was recuperating herself for the weary nights when sleep never visited the anguished pillow. At last he was awakened

by the cawing of the rooks from the adjacent Minster Gardens. The sun was shining through the old mulioned window, embowered in greenery, through which he caught a glimpse of the Cathedral. At first he had no idea where he was, but in an instant it all came back, and he sprang out of bed like a giant refreshed. He was strong and young again; when he looked in the glass he scarce knew himself. The squalid, hopeless, miserable past was left behind him like a hideous dream.

Then he thought of her, of Clara—how beautiful she was, how proud, how innocent.

He wondered if she ever thought of the poor soldier. They would act together, would be thrown daily in each other's society, and then—yes, then!

Anyhow it was his duty to call and leave his card; indeed, he had promised Fairfax that he would do so.

Notwithstanding his mind being thus exercised, his body asserted the right to be cared for, so he ate a hearty breakfast, dressed himself with unusual care, and when he turned out he was the handsomest young fellow to be seen that day in the city of Rosemount.

With a strange feeling of embarrassment he knocked at the door of the theatre house, and inquired of Brown if Miss Trevor was at home.

Brown was heartily glad to see him, but replied that the young lady was out.

"She stayed till half-past one, sir," he said; "in fact, the chief kept the horses waiting half an hour, thinking you would call. Dinner's ordered for five, sir."

A little disappointed, Herbert left his card and said—
"Will you say I called, Brown?"

Had Clara been at home—had they met alone that morning—but it was not to be!

He turned from the door, and once and for all the current of their lives was changed. He paused for a moment to look at the playbill. All the old names were there, and one or two new ones which he did not know.

Then he resumed his walk.

Sauntering through the main street of the city he turned towards the right, passed over the river's bridge, and walked straight on till he reached the city's gates. Then he ascended by the Barbican, and strolled along the summit of the walls, which commanded a magnificent view of the adjacent country.

It had been his favourite walk when quartered at Rosemount. Here, many a time and oft, had he, poor Harry Armitage, and Phil Blake strolled in the gloaming to smoke their evening cigars. He paused to look into the convent grounds which lay beneath. The nuns were moving noiselessly and listlessly to and fro, just as they were wont to move a year ago—just as their predecessors were wont to move a century ago.

The very last time he stood on this spot with his friends, night was falling, and the sisterhood were flitting about in the same ghostly, aimless manner as now, and he began instinctively to quote Maturin's fine lines:—

“Yea! thus they live, if life it can be called,
Where moving shadows mock the parts of men.”

“Of women, you mean,” interrupted Hal.

“Ay, very much women, dear boys,” said Phil.

"Don't you know that it was here, in this very cage beneath our feet, that poor, fiery, frail Anne Bellamy fretted her heart out against the prison bars, till she burst forth and shattered her wings in that last fatal flight that ended in misery, and shame, and worse." And then he told them the story of the spoiled beauty.

Herbert remembered every word that Phil had said. He could hear the very sound of the rich musical voice.

Poor Phil! where was he? And what had become of *her*?

At this moment a young lady, clad in deep mourning, approached. She was tall, and of distinguished demeanour. Lifting his hat he stepped aside to let her pass. As she did so she raised her eyes, the blood rushed from her heart to her face, as she exclaimed—

"Mr. Herbert!"

"Miss Blake!" he answered, in astonishment. "Good heavens! How strange! At this very moment I was thinking of you."

"Of me!" she replied, in equal astonishment.

"Of you; the very last time I was here your father stood beside me on this very spot."

"My father! My poor father!" she said, sadly.

Something in the tone of her voice struck him.

"Pardon me," said he, "you are in mourning. Is it for—?"

"For both," she answered. "He came back from that dreadful Soudan death-stricken. Mamma tended him by day and night, and in less than a week after he had been taken from us she followed him; they share the same grave."

"Forgive me," said Herbert, "that I have recalled this great trouble."

"Trouble," she answered. "It is a relief, it is a pleasure to speak of him, and her, to one who knew them, and who loved him as I know he—he loved you. I am here amongst strangers, to whom I am unknown, even by name, and in all that pertains to my past life my lips are sealed."

"Amongst strangers!" and then he enquired with diffidence—"May I venture to enquire what has brought you here?"

"My profession."

"Your profession!"

"Yes. I am fulfilling an engagement at the theatre."

"At the theatre here?"

"Yes, here, sir, where once upon a time you enacted young Romeo."

"You astonish me."

"Oh! nothing more natural. I always loved the art, and when I found myself cast on the world I resolved to try the stage. One must live, you know. I had often heard papa speak of Mr. Fairfax, his kindness and liberality to young beginners, so after every stage-door in London had been closed in my face, I induced an eminent actress who had given me some lessons to accompany me to his rooms at his hotel in town, and he gave me an engagement there and then.

"I have been in his company more than ten months.

"If you are staying here to-night I hope you will come and see me act."

"I will not only come and see you act, but I hope I shall soon act with you."

"You—you!"

"Oh! yes. I sold out more than twelve months ago, and am going to tempt fortune on the stage myself—in fact, I am here now to join Mr. Fairfax's company."

"How strange," she said, as they walked back towards the city. "And what are you going to act, pray?"

"Whatever Mr. Fairfax chooses to give me. He says I am to begin at the beginning. And you—what do you act?"

"Oh, anything—everything, but I have already been entrusted with many very important parts."

"Pardon me, but I didn't perceive your name in the list of the company."

"No; my friend, Mrs. Vavasour, advised me not to act under my own name until I had made my mark, so even Mr. Fairfax himself is in total ignorance of my family or friends. I am known here only as Miss Challoner."

"Miss Challoner?"

"Yes, and you will oblige me by remembering Miss Blake only to forget her. Please recollect that for the present I am simply Miss Challoner."

"I shall recollect," he replied.

Then they chatted about the theatre, about the company, about everybody but Miss Clara Trevor.

Strange, they both instinctively avoided all mention even of her name!

At length they reached the ferry-boat, in which they crossed the river; then, resuming their home-

ward way, they reached Precentor's Court, where Caroline lodged in an old-fashioned house, the first from the main street.

They lingered for a moment at the door, and, as he lifted his hat to turn away, she said—

“Now, Mr. Herbert, what is it Laertes says to Ophelia?—

“‘Remember well
What I have said to you.’”

Placing his finger on his lip, he responded with mock gravity—

“‘’Tis in my memory locked,
And you yourself shall keep the key.’”

Then, with a smile on his lips, he took one step into the street, where he encountered—face to face—Fairfax and Clara.

By some fatality they were walking their horses past at that very moment.

They heard the words and saw the action, though Caroline, who had entered the house, did not see them.

The interview, the incident, the words were all the most innocent things in the world, yet the whole affair was most *mal à propos*.

Herbert bowed to Clara and Fairfax, and made towards them to offer his hand, but they both vouchsafed only the curtest recognition and passed on.

Now five minutes' explanation would have made all right, but he had given his promise to Caroline, and felt himself bound by it.

As he strolled towards his lodgings he thought he would go back and ask her consent to his explaining the nature and extent of their acquaintance to

Fairfax, and he returned to Precentor's Court for the purpose.

All at once it occurred to him that she might imagine there was something between him and Clara, which rendered such an explanation necessary; then he resolved that he would seek Fairfax at once and tell him that Miss Challoner was the daughter of their mutual friend, Phil Blake, and, firm in this resolution, he walked rapidly towards the Theatre House, reached the door, and—turned away.

"No, no," said he, "if I go volunteering explanations of this kind they will think there is an 'affair' between the girl and me. Let it slide."

Such accidents as these determine the career of a life—a life did I say?—sometimes of many lives.

You go up one street or down another and you meet your fate in the shape of some fragile woman or some stalwart man. Had you gone down the one street or up the other you had perchance escaped a life of weal or woe.

I don't think Herbert knew his own mind when he sallied forth that morning. Had he called earlier at the Theatre House, had he not taken that walk upon the city walls, how different might have been the fate of all concerned.

He went home to his simple meal, but he did not enjoy it with the appetite of the morning.

When Clara and Fairfax sat down to dinner there was a death's head at the feast; yes, there it was, in the middle of the table, staring them both in the face. They couldn't eat that, nor could they eat much else at that sitting. Dinner was a failure.

When the cloth was removed, Clara said—

"Papa, will you do me a great favour?"

"Anything in the world, my darling, that I can do."

"Thanks. You told me this morning that Mr. Herbert was to open in Romeo next week. I don't care to act with amateurs; please don't let me play Juliet."

"My child," Fairfax replied, "do be reasonable; it will be one of the greatest houses of the season."

"So much the better; I shall not be missed, and you've promised, you know."

"Yes, I know I promised; but, good Heavens! what am I to do for a Juliet?"

"Oh! there's Miss Challoner, another amateur. They will understand each other admirably; in fact, they do already."

"Clara," said Fairfax, gravely, "don't talk nonsense. Herbert is a man of the world—has 'seen men and cities'—"

"And women too, I've no doubt," she answered, bitterly.

"Certainly, no doubt," replied Fairfax. "I presume he has met Miss Challoner somewhere in his travels. Surely there's nothing criminal, or even remarkable in that!"

"I did not say there was," replied Clara; "only it does not say much for his taste—an awkward, gawky, sallow creature like that!"

"*Chacun à son goût*," muttered Fairfax, as if he were not altogether of that way of thinking.

"But, apart from that, I don't suppose Miss Challoner has ever played Juliet," he continued.

"Well, she has got a week to get 'up' in the part, and she can 'learn the drama's light from Romeo's

eyes.'” And then Clara went to Fairfax and hugged him, and said, “Oh! papa, bear with me, for I am very unhappy; never speak to me again about it. And oh! for Heaven’s sake, don’t ask me to play Juliet!” And then she rushed from the room.

Poor Clara! poor Fairfax! what more could he do to help her?

He lighted his cigar, unfolded his *Times*, and growled, “D—n the fellow! If I were his age, and only had the chance.”

The following morning Herbert called at the Theatre House to pay his respects to Clara.

“Miss Trevor was out,” Mrs. Brown said, curtly, “and Mr. Fairfax was engaged; but the stage-manager would acquaint Mr. Herbert with anything requisite to know about the business of the theatre.”

Accordingly, to the stage-manager Herbert went.

Mr. Tony Aston, a somewhat brusque and eccentric old man, informed him that he was to open in *Romeo* on the ensuing Monday, but that a rehearsal would be called to-morrow for him and Miss Challoner, who played Juliet.

The alteration in the cast astonished Herbert, but he had been a soldier, and he knew his first duty was obedience; so he heard all, and said nothing.

To his surprise, and, indeed, to the surprise of everybody else, Caroline was letter perfect in the text and thoroughly *au fait* in the “business.”

It was the one particular part she had known backward from childhood—the one particular part it had been the ambition of her life to play.

Apart from all this, she had studied it with Mrs.

Vavasour, besides which she had seen every actress of eminence who in her time had attempted Juliet.

As for Clara, if she were ungenerous enough to have thrown up the part merely to spite Herbert (and she was only a woman!), she was "hoist with her own petard," for she had given Caroline a chance for which she might have waited for months—perhaps years.

Although Fairfax sympathised with his ward, he did not suffer his feelings to affect the interests of the theatre; hence he made a feature of Herbert's opening, assured that, for one night at least, his friends would crowd the house.

Then the local papers spoke of "Captain Herbert, the hero of Tel-el-Kebir, who had taken to the stage, and would appear in his spirited impersonation of Romeo, so well remembered here," &c.

All the upper ten of Rosemount mustered in strong force. The Marquis of H—— and his family, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, the officers in garrison, and all the little big-wigs of the place.

The theatre was crowded, and Herbert had a tremendous reception. Poor Clara, sitting in her room in the Theatre House, heard it distinctly.

It was a night of triumph for Herbert, and a still greater one for Caroline, but of torture for Clara.

Perhaps, in her heart of hearts, she thought that Caroline would break down at the rehearsals, that he would come and beseech her to play Juliet. Perhaps she thought that the audience would resent another woman's playing her part.

Alas! the fickle multitude accepted the change with disgusting equanimity—even welcomed the stranger, and enjoyed the new sensation. It was hard to bear!

Fairfax saw all—his practised eye detected genius in Caroline and power in Herbert.

He had much to learn, Caroline but little; but when he had learnt he would tower over them all, that was Fairfax's opinion.

The furore increased act after act.

At last Clara could endure it no longer. Throwing a shawl over her head, she rushed from the side door of the house into the pit passage and leaped up the gallery steps. Olympus was crowded to the roof, but there she stood, at the back, amidst the great unwashed, and witnessed the last scene, until the curtain fell amidst a tempest of applause.

Then she sprang downstairs, returned to the house, bathed her face and eyes, and kept down her emotion as well as she could. For the future she resolved that her artistic ambition should triumph over her woman's weakness; that she would garner up her laurels, and that henceforth no one, man or woman, should rob her of a single leaf.

She bustled about and prepared Fairfax's supper, and when he came in, rather moody and depressed, she went up to him, bright and smiling, and putting her arms round his neck, she said—

"Papa, I've been very foolish, but oh! forgive me this once, and I'll never do so any more."

He kissed her, and said—

"Ah, my child, when you are older and wiser you'll know better. There, there, say no more about it."

On presenting himself at the theatre next morning, Herbert met with a cordial greeting from everyone but Clara, who sat alone at the prompt table.

When he approached to make his devoirs she rose and gave him the coldest, most chilling reception.

He tried to make conversation for a few minutes on subjects of general interest, but he might as well have tried to thaw the North Pole; so, finding every advance he made met with most freezing politeness, he took his departure somewhat mortified. Pride, always his foible but now his safeguard, came to the rescue, and he resolved henceforth to be as distant as she was; while as to Caroline—well, perhaps he had already compromised her by his indiscreet attentions. For the future it behoved him to be more prudent. Besides, had he not his art to occupy his thoughts and engross his mind? We shall see.

For the first week he had an easy time, too easy, in fact. He went to the theatre nightly to see the performances, which he now regarded with especial interest, and justly so, inasmuch as nothing but the best pieces were selected, and they were performed in the best manner.

One morning Fairfax said to him—

“Now look here, Jack, I like you, and I like not everyone; and if you will be guided by me I’ll put you on the right track, but we must have no illusions. Don’t imagine that you can leap upon the stage, like Pallas from the front of Jove, and say, ‘Hoop-la! here I am—an actor, ready-made!’ Not so, my boy. Remember that ‘Humility is the first step in the ladder of wisdom;’ hence you must work morning, noon, and night, if ever you mean to succeed. What is it Sir Joshua says—or is it old Bruin or Burke who says it for him?—‘Excellence was never granted to man but as the reward of labour.’”

Herbert took this advice to heart, and profited by it. He was always ready to put his shoulder to the wheel in every department. If any member of the company was indisposed or unable from any cause to fulfil his duties, he was the stop-gap; if anyone was unable to study a long part at short notice, he came to the rescue.

With such industry, such ardour, and such modesty the result could not be doubtful.

And now help me, gentle reader, to leap over a year at a bound.

After twelve months' assiduous and indefatigable application Herbert had mastered the rudiments of his art. His muscles were entirely subservient to his mind, habit had become second nature—no occasion now to pause to think what to do with his hands or where to place his feet. He moved with grace, ease, elegance, distinction, and perfect harmony of motion. In a word, he had become an actor, and was now dividing public favour with Clara, with Caroline, and even with Fairfax himself.

Meanwhile, the relations between those two young ladies had, unfortunately, not become more cordial.

Of course, Clara had a monopoly of nearly all the great parts, but Caroline's performance of Juliet (of which she retained undisturbed possession) brought her immediately to the front, and Clara found that by her own imprudence she had enabled her rival to leap at once into public favour.

Henceforth it was a fight between these two for fame, and something more precious even than that.

CHAPTER V.

MY OWN ORDEAL.

"Poverty abhor'd of men."

ON my return to England I found that Jack had sold out, that Phil Blake was invalided, and that the regiment, or what was left of it, had been sent to the Cape.

I got Herbert's last letter from Cox's, and wrote to him there. I wrote also to Blake in Ireland.

Both letters came back, endorsed "Gone—address unknown."

I called on my old schoolmaster at Clapham—"dead!"

I went down to Sandhurst. Couldn't find a soul there who knew, or cared to know, me.

Hopelessly lame in my left ankle and suffering from a severe attack of bronchitis, I felt quite incapacitated for the active duties of my profession, and I, too, sold out.

As I was now living on my small capital it was essential to look at every shilling; hence I retired to humble diggings on the other side of the river.

Strangely enough, as I learnt afterwards, when we compared notes, I lived within a hundred yards of

where Herbert hung out. Had I only known it, what a blessing it would have been to both of us, but in London you may live next door—nay, in the very same house with your dearest friend—and not become aware of his existence. Anyhow, Jack and I were within a stone's-throw of each other and didn't know it.

When his struggles were over mine were about to begin in real earnest.

My father at one time had some little influence at the India House, and I thought his name might prove a passport to something in the Company's Civil Service. For upwards of two years I tried to obtain employment, but in vain. At length my little hoard was almost exhausted, and I had to look forward to a hopeless struggle for bread.

When I recall that time, without a friend—nay, even an acquaintance—no home but a miserable, squalid lodging, with a loud-mouthed brutal shrew of a landlady, I wonder I ever lived through it. Fortunately I had my books—my blessed books—not many, it is true, but good—my pipe, my daily penny paper, and an occasional shilling or sixpenny-worth in the gallery of a theatre.

Sundays I made a perpetual holiday, by every week seeking out a fresh place of worship, and thereby gaining many strange experiences which may some day see the light.

"When things get to the worst they must mend or end," and at length it pleased God to take compassion on my loneliness and my misery, and to send me succour in the shape of a—fiddler!

Amongst the extraordinary coincidences of Jack's

life and mine the occurrence I am about to relate is not the least remarkable.

Jack's *deus ex machinâ* turned up at Evans's; mine exactly opposite Sotheran's book-shop, at the corner of Lancaster Place.

One afternoon, loafing idly along the Strand, my eyes cast on the ground (for I was beginning to give life up as a bad job), I accidentally stumbled against a man, who exclaimed—

"*Donnerwetter!* can you not—*Ach! Mein Gott!*—it is Penarvon!" and I found myself being violently hugged and embraced by our late bandmaster.

A crowd gathered round us. They must have thought we were both mad, seeing two great bearded men hugging one another.

Van Vort was the first to recover, and he said to the astonished gapers—

"Good people, it is mine comrade from the Soudan. We have fought together for your England. I thought him dead, and I find him alive. That is all!"

As he took me by the arm and led me down the Strand a cheer arose that might have been heard at Charing Cross.

The sound almost upset me, but Van Vort was steady as a rock, and I hung on to him and never let go until I came to anchor at his club, a famous theatrical rendezvous in the Savoy.

There he ordered dinner and wine, the best the place afforded.

Then he talked—ye gods! how he talked! He rattled off his own experiences without taking breath.

He had relinquished his appointment as bandmaster of the —th, and was now leader of the orchestra at

the Frivolity—a capital appointment. His manager was an excellent musician, and the most enterprising fellow in the world; his band was the best in London, and he was now engaged in composing and selecting the music for the new extravaganza, “The Banker of the Bosphorus.” Then he inquired about my prospects.

By this time I had had a glass or two of wine, and I was really so glad to see the honest fellow that I told him exactly how I was situated.

“Ah,” said he, “we will soon alter that. First we must send to Herbert.”

“What about Herbert?” I inquired.

Then he told me all about Jack’s career; “he was the coming man, the biggest actor alive, and had great influence with his manager. Van Vort was sure he would find me a berth of some kind. There and then I wrote to Herbert, and next morning got a telegram from him in reply, urging me to come down to Rosemount immediately.

Without an hour’s delay I left cruel London behind me, and when I arrived at my journey’s end I found my dear old friend’s heart and arms open to receive me as of old.

CHAPTER VI.

HER MAJESTY'S SERVANTS.

"The actors are at hand, and by their show
You shall know all that you are like to know."

HERBERT'S Benefit took place on the very night of my arrival. After introducing me to Mr. Fairfax (who received me with great courtesy), Jack took me round to the front of the house before the doors were opened and put me in the first row of the dress circle, where luckily for me, there remained one seat still unlet. Presently in came the audience with a rush, and five minutes later the theatre was crowded in every part.

The play was Banim and Sheil's noble and almost forgotten play "Damon and Pythias." I forget what the after-piece was.

I had never seen the theatre, had never seen either of the plays, or any of the players before.

After the gloom and loneliness of my life in London the gay and exciting scene seemed enchantment, and when the curtain rose I was in Elysium.

Herbert acted Damon; a Mr. Bellhouse, Pythias; and Mr. Boanergus, before referred to, was Dionysius; Caroline was Damon's wife, Hermion; and Clara was Calanthe, the beloved of Pythias.

When the play commenced there was a short scene

occupied by some of the minor characters. Then Herbert came on, and a shout of recognition arose which filled the theatre. At first he seemed as if his mind was so engrossed with the thoughts which were struggling for utterance that he was oblivious of all else, but the applause was so loud, and so prolonged, that he started from his reverie and bowed a brief acknowledgment.

Here I fear the captious critic and even the patient, long-suffering reader may be tempted to exclaim, "Confound the fellow! what has this to do with the story?"

Gracious critic, gentle reader, I wish to introduce my hero and my rival heroines just as they were introduced to me, and, furthermore, I want to endeavour to impress you as I was impressed on this eventful occasion.

If you object that "heroes are bores," I reply, "Speak for yourselves!"

For my part I refuse to believe that an age which has produced and deified a Mazzini, a Garibaldi, a Lincoln, a Garfield, a Grant, a Gambetta, and a Gordon does not sympathise with heroes.

Without hero-worship there would be no heroes. I am a worshipper. Jack is my hero and Clara and Caroline my heroines!

Of course you will retort with amused disdain, "My good man, gush as much as you please over a *soi-disant* soldier turned play-actor, and two young ladies, who despite your rhapsodies, are mere country play-actresses, but don't expect us to follow suit."

Now here I have the advantage; you must either follow suit or throw up the cards.

"You shall have the mustard,
Else you get no beef from Grumio."

Abandoning metaphor, if you don't care to know what my hero and heroines are like, drop this book and take up another; if you do care, follow me while I endeavour to describe them.

To begin, then, with my hero.

Imagine, if you please, a man of nearly six feet, built in heroic mould, clad in the glorious garb of old Greece—an under-garment of some delicate saffron-coloured material, relieved by a flowing robe of dark purple. A majestic head, with a profusion of dark waving hair, a delicate, straight nose, from which radiated downwards from either nostril those two deep lines which emotion always appears to trace in the features of great actors; massive eyebrows, with long, dark eyelashes, piercing, splendid eyes; a mouth, firm almost to obstinacy, with the underlip slightly pouting above the dimpled chin; a fair, smoothly-shaven face, which scarcely revealed a trace of his rich brown beard, thus enabling him to preserve the aspect of perpetual youth.

"Thro' his bright eyes Apollo beamed in light,
On his imperial brows Jove set the seal of might!"

Such was the picture of my dear old chum when I first beheld him on the stage, and for many a night after.

As the play progressed, Damon appeared to be in peril from some ruffian soldiers, and there came to his rescue a tall, handsome young fellow, hight Pythias, of fair complexion, well-featured, well-formed too, but, to my thinking, rather commonplace.

To him enters Calanthe.

The reader has met with Clara Trevor before, but no justice has yet been done to her marvellous beauty; bear with me, then, while I stay to describe her as she first burst on my enraptured sight.

Like Rosalind, she was "more than common tall;" and the noble undulations of her supple and ebullient figure revealed their statuesque outlines beneath her almost diaphanous robes of white samite and silver. Her face, which was of a pure oval, was surmounted with the brow of a goddess; her nose was short, straight, and delicate, with nostrils as mobile as they were transparent; while her dazzling teeth shone like ivory through the ripe, rosy lips, which curved over them like the bow of Cupid.

Her skin was white as alabaster.

"Then her neck, Jack, her neck!"

Surely she had the most perfect hands, arms, and shoulders in all the wide world!

Her eyes, luminous with liquid living light, were grey, or green, or blue, or brown, or violet, or all combined; her brows and eyelashes were black as the darkest night, and her beautiful head was crowned with a waving glory of red hair, bound with a fillet of white, and fastened in one huge knot behind.

Mark, gentle reader, her hair was none of your beastly Auricomus tint, but Red, real Red; the Red that Titian and Tintoretto loved to paint!

In the last scene, as she fell fainting in Pythias' arms, by accident or design, the fillet burst, and when her glorious tresses streamed down almost to her knees, they literally covered her shoulders and his as with a flood of sunbeams!

When she spoke, her voice, like Desdemona's, was "an alarum to love."

As for her smile, Pythias spoke but prosaic truth when he exclaimed—

“By the birth of Venus,
When she rose from out the sea,
And filled the Grecian Isles with everlasting verdure,
Her smile, fresh from the soft creation of the wave,
Was not more beautiful than thine,
My own Calanthe!”

As she and her soldier-lover passed forth, lo! the wife of Damon glided on, and twined her lovely arms round his neck, resting her superb head with its massive coils of blue-black hair on his broad shoulders. Dazzled and delighted as I had been with the glowing charms of Clara, I was profoundly impressed with the majesty and grace, the classic and imperial beauty of Caroline. Two women so lovely, and yet of such opposing types of loveliness, I had never seen before, nor have I since. The one was “like the morning, dewy-eyed and fair; the other like the twilight, soft and dark.” This striking contrast gave an added charm to both.

Had I been cast the part of Paris, being myself as black as a crow, I suppose I should naturally have awarded the auriferous fruit to my golden-haired goddess.

When Damon and Hermion spoke they filled the air with music; and, as they moved, each step and every gesture recalled to my mind visions of “that marble majesty of the elder world,” when Phidias devoted his genius to the “deification of man’s strength and woman’s loveliness.”

I followed the progress of the play with continually increasing interest until it approached a termination.

Calanthe had been borne fainting from the stage.

“Beside the block the sullen headsman stood.”

Pythias had nerved himself to die for his friend's sake. His comely head was bowed upon the block, the axe was uplifted in the air, the fatal blow was about to descend, when lo ! the hum of distant voices — shouts, nearer, yet nearer still. Then an acclamation that shook the theatre, as the prison gates were dashed asunder, and in the centre of the stage stood a wild, demented man. His dress was torn to tatters, his head and neck besmeared by a bloody sweat, his hair dishevelled, his nostrils dilated, and his eyes ablaze. With a wild, maniacal laugh, which sent a thrill through me and through the house, his eyes flashed fire ; his face became fixed ; a convulsive quiver, a sort of *rigor mortis*, appeared to pass through every limb and every nerve ; till, with a crash which seemed to shake the building to its base, Damon fell senseless on the stage.

The illusion was so complete, and the effect so awful, that I really thought that he was stricken dead, and was with difficulty restrained from going to his help.

Presently, however, he recovered from his swoon, and, recognizing Pythias, in a paroxysm of delirious joy, he recounted how he had obtained the good steed, with whose help he had been enabled to return to Syracuse in time to redeem his promise and to save his friend.

At this moment Dionysius advanced and called upon the proud Pythagorean to redeem his word.

At the sound of the tyrant's voice, Damon sprang from the centre of the stage, and with one bound leaped upon the scaffold, exclaiming, " Lo ! I am here ! "

As the words left his lips he stood like a man transformed to stone.

The effect was electrical. The house "rose" at him, and the audience went mad with excitement ; so did I.

In the end the friends were restored to life, love, and liberty, and amidst the general rejoicings the curtain fell.

I was so excited and delighted that I didn't care to see the after-piece ; so I rose and left the theatre and strolled round the minster in the moonlight, smoking my pipe and thinking over what I had seen, till the streaming out of the crowd told me the performance was over.

I have dwelt at length upon the impressions of that memorable night, not only because it marked an epoch in this story, but because it was then that for the first time I saw the light of my life.

Ah ! my darling ! I loved you from that moment, and I shall love you until I die !

CHAPTER VII.

MY FIRST AND LAST APPEARANCE AS AN ACTOR.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

THANKS to Herbert's influence, my name was placed on the free list.

I was punctual in my attendance at the boxes every night. Sometimes I had them almost entirely to myself. On these occasions Jack used to call me the "box audience." More frequently, though, I was crowded out of sight, and was glad to squeeze in where I could.

There were three or four new plays every week. Think of that, *blasé* London play-goers, condemned to one piece for twelve months running!

Of course the accumulation of this abundant repertoire had been the result of years of labour; but the acting appeared so easy, so simple, so natural, that I needs must think it was the easiest thing in the world to do, and that I could go on the stage and act myself.

One day Jack came home sorely exercised in his mind at being cast "Joseph Surface," a part he had never acted, and one, moreover, which he detested.

Now, "The School for Scandal" was a play in which I took great interest, arising from the fact that in our regimental amateur performances, when I was

in the Greys, I had acted "Careless," and, having a decent baritone voice, had not only sung the incidental song, "Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen," but had actually got an encore for it.

Of course I duly recounted my "peaceful triumphs" to Jack, who used to banter me in his quiet, pleasant manner, and say, "I see what'll be the end of it, Bob—you'll be disgracing your family by going on the stage yourself."

"There is many a true word spoken in jest." I don't think I disgraced my family, but I certainly disgraced the stage by bringing upon it (I can afford to be candid now) the most arrant duffer that ever walked on two legs.

This was how it befel:—

On the morning of the production of "The School for Scandal" Bellhouse, who was the stock Careless, in going down the pit passage, sprained his ankle by slipping on a piece of orange peel, and had to be carried home. There was no possibility of his acting that night; hence it occurred to Jack that here was a desirable opening for me. So down he came to St. Dunstan's Close, dragged me up to the theatre, and, almost before I knew where I was, I found myself pitchforked on the stage rehearsing Careless. Of course I was letter-perfect in the words, and rattled them off glibly enough. I sang my song, too, without a false note. It was in vain that I urged that I was lame; Jack insisted that my infirmity was scarcely perceptible.

The whole thing was done so quickly I hadn't time to get nervous in the morning.

Alas! it was a very different thing at night. My

delusion was roughly dispelled, and I was soon fated to learn the difference between an amateur and an actor!

A great house was anticipated; all the seats were taken for the boxes.

The play was a never-failing attraction when Fairfax played in it.

Charles was his crack part. Other Hamlets, Othellos, and Macbeths there were in abundance; but there was only one Charles Surface, and his name was Frank Fairfax. Besides this, the play was admirably acted and superbly mounted.

There was only one drawback—my unlucky self.

Jack was engrossed and preoccupied all the afternoon, having Joseph Surface on the brain. So was I; and by about five o'clock I began to quake.

I didn't know what stage-fright meant then. I know now.

Jack kept ominously silent, or spoke only in monosyllables. At last I could stand it no longer, so off I went, taking the precaution, however, to borrow from him a pair of shoes and buckles, a pair of white silk stockings, some ruffles, and other fal-lals.

I had looked out my costume in the morning, and left it in the spot assigned for my dressing-place.

When I arrived at the theatre the gas was not lighted, so I turned out and took a stroll round the minster while I smoked a pipe. Usually the nicotian weed soothes me, now it only irritated me.

Back I went to the theatre. Found it still in total darkness; out again into the streets, until I fretted myself into a fever.

Another half-hour, then back again. At last the

gas is lighted, only half-lighted though; 'tis a sort of darkness visible.

I grope my way down a long, gloomy, vaulted corridor to the dressing-room.

I am the first man in.

The place is awfully quiet, not a sound, not a breath is to be heard; there is something ghastly, sepulchral, and uncanny about the whole arrangement.

There are ten or a dozen wig-blocks, looking awfully like human spectral skulls, surmounted by white-powdered wigs; they are screwed on the edges of the long toilet tables on either side of the room.

Hanging up here and there are the embroidered coats and hats of a century ago; there is an eerie look about it all.

I find my way to my dressing-place (it is next to Jack's), and commence overhauling my costume; it is a queer, old-fashioned Court dress, a real one. I wonder what youthful macaroni was presented at Court in it, how many generations of Carelesses have worn it before me, how many of them are living, how many dead, and where they are buried?

A lively train of thought I've got into certainly!

All at once it occurs to me that my unfortunate legs are not "things of beauty," and that I'd better cover them up before the other fellows arrive.

I begin to wrestle with Jack's stockings. There's room enough and to spare in the legs, but oh! my unfortunate feet!

With a desperate effort I succeed in getting them on, and commence another tussle with my subligaculæ. I am rather ignorant of the geography of these garments, but at last I struggle into them.

At this moment I look up towards the door, and as I'm a mortal man (don't laugh, reader!), I see, or think I see, the figure of "The White Ladye of Rosemount," of whom I have heard so much, in the doorway!

She is looking steadfastly at me. Evidently she is a well-bred person, inasmuch as she has deferred her visit till I am fit to receive her as a gentleman should.

I advance, she retires. As I reach the doorway the lights go up with a sound like the whistle of a small steam engine, and my lady fades into air. Then come the sound of advancing feet, the hubbub of voices, pleasant laughter—the murmur of a gathering crowd in the pit passage underneath.

A minute afterwards and the dressing-room is filled with the "boys." I breathe again, although I am still puzzled to know what "The White Ladye" can possibly want with me.

I once thought of speaking to Jack on the subject, but concluded that he had enough on his mind already. As for the other fellows, I'd no desire to become the butt of the dressing-room.

Fact or fancy as the apparition might have been, it certainly doesn't help me over the ground either in my preparations or my subsequent performance. Jack could give me no help, and all the others were dressing away for dear life to begin the piece. They, however, left old Wigley, one of the dressers, entirely to me. Poor old Wig is normally imbecile, but on this occasion he is wholly idiotic, and "tight as a drum" in the bargain.

My next operation is to get on Jack's shoes, which are nearly two sizes too small, and give me "fits."

I have no wig, and it is necessary to powder my hair; of course I don't know how to set about it. Wigley suggests I should commence operations by anointing my head with bears' grease, but the powder won't adhere.

Accepting another suggestion from Boanergus, I plaster my hair with soap. The powder sticks fast enough then, I warrant you.

By this time the first act is over, the actors return from the stage, laughing and talking. I can't see what there is to laugh at; at any rate, I am in no mood for laughter.

The second act has commenced. "Now," I imagine, "I am sure to have the dressing-room to myself." A large, well-furnished room it was, but, confound the fellows! one half of them still remain to tell funny stories. I can't see the Joe Miller of their ancient "wheezes." "Why the deuce can't they go to the green-room?"

My hair, which curls naturally, is rather of a woolly texture—is utterly intractable, and sticks up and down in crinkly undulations; while, as to my face, in vain I plaster pigment over pigment, they only melt and burst out in blotches, leaving my black beard blacker than ever.

As I stand trembling before the glass, I contemplate the reflection with horror; there is no mistake about it, the "make-up" is a ghastly failure; I am more like a nigger than an English gentleman.

The second act is over now, and the call-boy sings out, "Beginners for the third act!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaim, "I'm on in the third scene! What shall I do?"

"Try back, sir," mumbles Wigley.

Happy thought! I will wash the beastly stuff off, and begin all over again.

Away I rush to the wash-stand, sluice my face with soap and water, rub it dry until it is red as beet-root, while "each particular hair stands on end like quills upon the fretful porcupine."

The actors—for they are all good fellows—ceased to laugh at each other's jokes now; each one suggests his particular process of "making up;" every one begins to assist me, when, lo! the call-boy makes the special call, always eagerly anticipated in this play—

"Mr. Fairfax's compliments, will the gentlemen do him the honour to take wine with him on the stage?"

At this summons I am left to my fate and to Wigley, who is now more idiotic than ever.

Two minutes later the call-boy returns, and roars out, "Mr. Penarvon! Stage waiting!"

Away I run as hard as I can split; in my haste I catch my foot upon a step in the passage; stumbling forward, I fall at full length, bursting Jack's unfortunate pumps in every direction, bursting every button about me, all over the place, bursting my knees out of my beastly breeches; the thrice-accursed things are tumbling down about me; I hold them up with one hand, with the other I try to pull up Jack's stockings, which are falling in festoons about my unfortunate spindle shanks, and with the cold sweat oozing from my face, which by this time is like a badly-boiled plum-pudding, my legs trembling beneath me like a pair of stuffed eel-skins, I stagger to my place.

I defy any one to imagine a more woeful object than the unfortunate, half-dressed, wholly dazed, and

utterly demoralised creature who now figures as the intimate friend of the elegant and accomplished Charles Surface.

When the scene draws off discovering the graceless scapegrace and his boon companions, there is an expression of delight, and indeed it is a pleasant picture which meets the eye, if I had only been in a mood to enjoy it.

Upwards of a dozen young fellows, attired in the becoming costume of the period, overflowing with the exuberance of animal spirits, keep the table in a roar.

The central table groans beneath the weight of fruit and flowers and the choicest wines; the walls are covered with "the family of the Surfaces from the time of the Conquest" (for Fairfax is the author of the daring innovation of playing the drinking scene and picture scene together—an arrangement subsequently followed by various London and American managers, and described by those eminent authorities as being of their own original invention).

Amidst this flow of gaiety and brilliancy I feel like death at the feast, and my most fervent aspiration is that the stage will open beneath my feet and precipitate me into the depths below.

The joyous ebullience of Fairfax, the peals of laughter which greet his every utterance, surprise and discomfit me.

In my fevered fancy I think that the laughter is directed at me. I stumble and stutter through my two or three first speeches, sticking at every word; then comes my song, and here even worse luck befalls me, for I start in a false key, come to grief in the very

first verse, break down ignominiously, turn tail, and bolt off the stage amidst a yell of derision.

I learn afterwards that Fairfax turns the situation adroitly by exclaiming, "Poor Careless! I fear he has taken one of these fellows" (pointing to a flunky) "for a bailiff. Never mind, I'll give you the song myself;" and he rattles it off with a life and go which carry everything before them. Young Howard, who plays Sir Benjamin Backbite, speaks the lines of Careless, and the play proceeds without my absence being further noticed.

Overwhelmed with shame and mortification, I rush to the dressing-room, tear off my traps, anxious only to escape before the actors leave the stage, determined never to show my face in the hateful place again.

As I am rushing out I encounter my angel, who is playing Lady Teazle. She's more beautiful than ever, but how stately she looks, how proud, how unsympathetic!

Notwithstanding my silent adoration for this glorious creature, I had never spoken to her in my life until that morning, when Fairfax introduced me. I could scarcely get a word out, still it was something to feel, to know that I was perhaps about to be brought daily in contact with her. I had given way to all sorts of foolish dreams and ambitious aspirations, and now it has come to this! Henceforth she will only regard me as the ridiculous amateur who had made an ass of himself. It is hard to bear!

As I pass by I lift my hat; I don't know whether she returns the salutation or not; I reach the door when a soft, sweet voice says, "Mr. Penarvon!"

I turn and look. Can this be the proud, unsympa-

thetic Miss Trevor? She extends her hand; I come forward and bend over it; she continues—

“I am so sorry.”

At the words I break down utterly, “Thank you! Good-bye! God bless you, Miss Trevor!” is all I can get out.

“Good-bye!” she echoes in astonishment. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” I reply, “that after this mortification and disgrace I dare not look any of these people in the face again. To-morrow, by the first train, I leave Rosemount for ever.”

“You cannot be serious!” she exclaims. “What has happened to you to-night happens to us all at some time or other.”

At this moment Fairfax, accompanied by Charles Surface’s servants (who carried the remains of the dessert, the flowers, and the bottle of champagne), approaches the ladies’ dressing-room and requests them to do him the honour of taking wine with him—a ceremony never omitted by the gallant Frank—and, indeed, one that formed part and parcel of the performance of “The School for Scandal” during all his *régime*.

“Oh! papa,” says my lady Teazle, “Mr. Penarvon is so distressed about this unfortunate occurrence, that he says he means to go away and leave us all at a moment’s notice.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, my dear boy,” rejoins Fairfax. “Don’t talk nonsense. Any man who is worth his salt, anyone who has the highly-wrought nervous temperament which is absolutely essential to an actor, must be knocked over some time or other.

"Show me an actor who is not subject to stage-fright, and I'll show you an ass!

"Nay, more, show me a man who is incapable of stage-fright, and I'll show you an unsympathetic, unimaginative blockhead, who is incapable of ever becoming an actor.

"I made a much more miserable breakdown than you have done, the second night I ever tried to act. It was at Worcester—the High Sheriff's bespeak. I was playing a soldier (handsome Harry Howe's part in 'The Sheriff of the County'), who has only a dozen lines or so to speak. I 'got myself up regardless' in a splendid military uniform—strapped up to within an inch of my life—ramrod up my back, busbie on my head, black leathern stock tightened round my neck, till I thought my head would burst and fly off.

"Down I walked to the footlights. As soon as I caught sight of the audience glaring at me deuce a word could I get out, good, bad, or indifferent. I merely stood still in the attitude of 'attention' and gasped, and I think I should have stood there gasping until now if the prompter hadn't called out very audibly, 'Now then, stupid! are you going to stay there all night?' Then I found my tongue, and replied, 'No! I'm coming off to punch your head,' and I did it too!

"The operation was a sort of safety valve, but it was an expensive luxury, for it not only cost me my uniform, which burst to ribbons, but it also cost me my week's salary—(I was fined that amount!)—besides which I got notice to quit, and I should have been dismissed the company in disgrace if it had not been for the prompter, who, though a little crusty, was the best fellow in the world. He not only forgave me the lick-

ing, but he also interceded with old Bennett, the manager, to permit me to remain, and I stayed in the circuit for three years, till he and I (not the manager, but the prompter!) became sworn friends and brothers.

"If you doubt me, ask Tony Aston, for he was the prompter."

At this moment the call-boy sings out, "Lady Teazle called for the act."

"Mind, you are to listen to papa, and to promise not to do anything rashly."

"Leave him to me, child, and go your way, or the stage will be waiting."

"Let the stage wait; I won't go till Mr. Penarvon promises."

"Ah, Miss Trevor!" I exclaim, "it is easy to promise to do anything you ask me."

"That is understood, then," replies my angel, smiling on me like sunshine as she goes away.

Then Fairfax takes me to his dressing-room, soothes me with a glass or two of wine, draws me out and gets me to talk.

On one point I am quite decided; I will never put foot on the stage again as an actor—no—never!

It is in vain that he tries to talk me out of my determination; I tell him I would rather stand again unarmed and defenceless before a battalion of Arabs led by the Mahdi himself than I would encounter for a second time the awful ordeal of this more awful night.

Finding that I am fixed as fate on the subject, he replies—

"Perhaps after all you are right, my boy; anyhow, take my advice, give yourself a fortnight's holiday at Scarboro'; the sea breezes will blow the cobwebs out

of your brains ; by the time you come back here you'll be a new man and this affair will be forgotten."

Next morning I call at the Theatre House with Jack to make my adieux, and actually Fairfax and Miss Trevor accompany us to the station.

As the carriage rolls away she smiles upon me.

Who is cold and unsympathetic now ?

"The White Ladye" has not brought me such bad luck after all !

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY.

"I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and labour'd much
How to forget that learning; but, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service."

SCARBORO' is the queen of the northern watering places, and a delightful spot I admit, but that fortnight was the longest I ever passed in my life.

At last one blessed red-letter day, to be remembered "to the crack of doom," I had a letter from Fairfax telling me that his private secretary had an offer to go to town, that the berth was open to me, if I thought it worthy of my acceptance.

Without an hour's delay I took the first train to Rosemount, and the very morning after my arrival was installed in my office.

Before he left for town old Gilbert, the departing secretary, initiated me as far as he could into my duties, and handed me over the keys of the check-boxes, the salary list, and the bank pass-book.

The position was one of great trust and confidence.

I had to take charge of the receipts overnight, to compare the tickets with the receipts, and pay them into the bank in the morning. I had also to write all busi-

ness letters, superintend the giving out of playbills, see to the advertisements, and to hold the treasury every Saturday for the company and every Tuesday for the tradesmen.

Despite an occasional blunder or two, I had the satisfaction of knowing that my services were appreciated by my employer, who at first seemed disposed to place "the pale spectrum of the salt" between us. His reserve, however, gave way to confidence as he perceived my industry and attention, and at length he came to regard me more as a friend than a servant.

Miss Trevor, too, who treated me at first with a little hauteur, when she found me patient, diligent, and unpresuming, began to thaw; then my natural taciturnity gave way, and I became more communicative, and endeavoured to make myself agreeable.

Although Fairfax had a wide circle of acquaintance, he had very few intimate friends. Three or four people were, however, free of the house, and they came whenever they liked and almost at all times.

There was Fred Bronson, the rector of the parish, who was a great authority on dogs and horses—never missed a meet, a St. Leger, or a Derby Day—was a capital man across country, and rode to hounds much better than he read the service. He had a splendid voice for a view hallo, but as for his sermons they were *vox et preterea nihil*.

There was his wife, a bustling little busy-body, who, in consequence of having a craze for blue china and mediæval brasses, never could find time to keep Fred's buttons in order.

Then there was Canon Black, the Catholic priest,

our next-door neighbour, as jolly an old boy as ever cracked a bottle or played dummy.

There was John Ralphstone, editor of the Conservative paper, who had been a barrister (it was rumoured that he had held a brief once!), and who was the image of Tom Pinch.

Sometimes Mrs. Ralphstone came, although John preferred to leave her at Ralphstone Villa to look after the numerous and continually increasing olive branches, while he made a fourth at whist at the Theatre House.

I was occasionally invited to join these impromptu parties, and very pleasant affairs they were.

Having accommodating views on theological subjects, and going turn and turn about, every other Sunday, from one church to the other, I got on capitally with the priests of both denominations, being not infrequently invited to dine after the service with one or other.

When I dined with the Canon and his boys (*i.e.* curates) I was always called upon (tell it not in Gath!) to take a hand at whist on Sunday afternoon.

Jack and I often used to turn in at the Bronsons', after the play, to smoke a pipe and drink a glass of beer or gin and water, while Fred presided over the festive board (in the absence of Mrs. Fred), inhaling the nicotian weed from a huge churchwarden, and telling us racy stories about old times at Eton and Oxford.

Sometimes we used to change the venue by dropping in to supper at Ralphstone Villa—always sure of a hearty welcome, for Jack was a great favourite of Mrs. Ralphstone's, who scarcely ever missed a night at the play.

Our clerical friends were also very fond of the theatre, but dared not be seen there for fear of "Mrs. Grundy," although once, when Fairfax gave a ball and supper on the stage, they came and openly joined in the festivities, and flirted in the most audacious manner with our womankind, actually putting our noses out of joint altogether, always excepting Jack—dear old fellow! No one ever could put his nose out of joint with the girls.

While the Haymarket people were fulfilling an engagement at Rosemount we went over to act in Barford for a few nights.

As there was no theatre there, we had to take over our scenery and fit it up in St. James's Hall, a large and magnificent building.

To our astonishment and delight, the Canon and his "boys," Bronson and his curate, turned up, in the most ostentatious manner, in the front seats on our opening night, and actually did not miss a single performance. To be sure, Barford was twelve miles from Rosemount, but it was not the distance that made the difference; it was because we were *not* acting in "that wicked theatre"—a nice distinction, truly!

During the run of a new play, written by one of our most distinguished authors (a play, I may remark, we produced for the first time at Rosemount), the hero was a young parson, an Oxford man, supposed to hail from Maudlin (Bronson's College), and he was naturally anxious to see how one of his own cloth would figure on the stage. Fairfax, therefore, arranged for Fred to enter by the stage door, so as to reach the private box without being seen by the multitude. There, ensconced behind the drapery and out of sight of

audience, he sat, enjoying himself like a truant school-boy out for a holiday.

To our astonishment, however, he called to lunch at the Theatre House next day in a state of great perturbation, alleging that early that morning, just as he was about to sit down to breakfast, he had received a visit from three women—three loud-talking, impudent, but influential women, district visitors—who opened fire upon him, stating that they had been credibly informed by a pious apple-woman, who kept a fruit-stall near the stage door, and who lived by disposing of her wares to the godless play-folk, that he had been seen on the previous night “entering the bottomless pit of abomination in company with that son of Belial, Fairfax.”

Imagine the poor fellow submitting to this to avoid scandal!

He took it out, however, whenever he got a chance, for when away from home he never missed a single night at the play. *Nous avons changé tout cela.* One can't go into a theatre anywhere now-a-days without meeting half-a-dozen parsons.

I had to call daily to leave my returns of the receipts. Sometimes Fairfax appeared out of sorts; then he would invite me to stay and smoke a cigar. On these occasions he would turn the conversation to my experiences in Egypt, which apparently interested both him and Clara.

I used to try to draw him out about his own reminiscences, which to me were a source of never-failing pleasure. At first he was somewhat reticent, but both Clara and I loved to listen, and when he was once set going he would talk by the hour and “act his young encounters o'er again.”

What an ass I must have been not to have committed his strange adventures to paper just as he told them. Talk about romances!—why his life was romance upon romance; in fact, a perfect circulating library of them.

Then Clara! Ah! it was enough for me to be near her, to breathe the same air with her. But, oh! to sit at the same table, to hear her speak—these were foretastes of Elysium!

In her best mood she was bright as sunshine, and her conversation was as sprightly and entertaining as her manner was ingenuous and engaging.

Sometimes after dinner, during our discussions on the politics or literature of the day, she would take advantage of a lull, to run over to the piano, and play and sing like a nightingale.

She had one rare and remarkable gift—a passion for adapting poetry to music. If any particular poem took her fancy, she would commit it to memory, and recite it as the inspiration took her, improvising a running tremolo accompaniment on the piano. The effect was indescribably beautiful and touching; indeed, no other combination of melodious sounds that I have heard has ever affected me so profoundly. Sometimes she would finish with a march or a battle piece which would culminate in a Babel of warlike sounds; then she would leave the room with a joyous laugh.

Sometimes she would cease in a minor key, couched in a tone so low “that nothing lived ’twixt it and silence.” Then she would remain for a few moments silent and motionless, and I could hear nothing but the beating of my own heart as she stole gently from the room.

That was the usual signal for my departure, when I too stole away, leaving Fairfax to his siesta.

In the midst of our most unrestrained conversation I noted that if I merely named Herbert or Caroline a coldness would ensue, then a silence; so after a time I avoided all mention of them. At first I attributed Clara's strange demeanour to merely professional jealousy; but my eyes were soon opened.

Though Herbert had never spoken one word of love to either of these charming creatures, both loved him. Each divined the other's secret, and each was mortally jealous of the other.

He must have been blind as a mole, or else intensely preoccupied with his studies, not to have perceived the state of affairs. I think perhaps the latter, for at this period he was engaged morning, noon, and night in probing the heart of the mighty mysteries of Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Lear.

Once, presuming on our long intimacy, I said to him—

“You seem fancy-free, Jack; do you never fall in love nowadays, old man?”

He replied with assumed gravity—

“Bob, a man whose heart is filled with a sublime ambition has no time to fall in love.”

My heart was not filled with a sublime ambition, but, alas! it was consumed by a hopeless love which I could confide to no one. As for the object of my adoration, she did not even dream of the engrossing passion which had now become part of my existence.

Lookers-on see the best of the game, and I observed, that if Herbert said a kind word, or offered the simplest

courtesy to one of these young ladies, the other fiercely, though silently, resented it.

Did he act a part with Caroline which infringed in the slightest degree on Clara's abundant repertoire, her anger was with difficulty restrained.

Did he act a part with Clara in which it was essential to appear ardent or amorous, it was a cruel wound to Caroline.

If he rehearsed a scene twice over with the one, it needed all the other's good breeding to enable her to restrain her impatience within reasonable bounds.

Yet all these fluctuations of feeling, all these varying shades of emotion, were represented by nothing more than a look, a shrug of the shoulders, or a gesture of impatience. To me, indeed, they were as transparent as glass, as apparent as the sun at noon-tide; but then I love *her*; nay, more, I loved them all, and my sympathetic regard for them enhanced the poignancy of my own sufferings.

The people by whom we were surrounded, however, except Fairfax (who, like myself, must have divined the truth!) had not the faintest idea of the inception of the tragedy which was ripening to maturity before their eyes.

My lips were sealed, yet, in my own small way, I laboured incessantly to prevent misunderstanding, or scandal.

Herbert remained chivalrously courteous to both ladies.

Caroline was always equable, though sometimes but coldly courteous; Clara, as the fit would take her, was like April: to-day, alternate cloud and sunshine; to-morrow, cold and cutting as the winds of March.

One day when she was April and March combined, I happened to be in the way ; Herbert made a little " moue " at me, and whispered—" *Varium et mutabile semper Fœmina !* eh, Bob ? " As a general rule, however, he bore these caprices of temper with imperturbable good humour.

So I watched and waited ; hopeless for myself, yet not altogether without hope that I might be enabled to shield those I loved from consequences which I feared to contemplate.

CHAPTER IX.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

"But heavenly Rosalind!"

DURING the first year of my engagement the novelty of my position and the constant change of scene involved by our periodical visits to the various towns of the circuit, occupied my time, and occasionally diverted my mind from my own troubles. At length we returned to Rosemount for the ensuing season.

At this period Mr. James Clerehead, the erratic and enterprising manager of the Royal Pandemonium Palace, the Megatherium, the Frivolity, &c., was beating up for recruits.

With characteristic modesty he had intimated to Fairfax that he was coming down to take stock of the company to see if there was anyone worthy of being picked up for his ensuing campaign in town.

In due course this gentleman turned up at the Theatre Royal, Rosemount, and it was my duty to escort him to a front seat which had been reserved for him in the centre boxes. A remarkable-looking person this! Slender, above the average height, a handsome head, sharp, aquiline nose, black hair, black moustache, dark eyebrows, piercing eyes, a pleasant cat-like smile, which seemed as if it might be perpetual, though I have seen it change into a tiger-like fierceness; a draw-

ling but not disagreeable voice, and a habit of saying the most unpleasant things in the pleasantest manner possible.

The performance consisted of "As You Like It" and "Don Cæsar de Bazan."

The great *impresario* glanced at the programme, and muttered in the most *insouciant* manner, as if he were evoking an indolent blessing—"The Bard again! — the Bard! These country actors have got their blessed Bard on the brain!"

Then turning to me he said, with languid insolence, "I say, sir, look here; I've been travelling five mortal hours, and have only just arrived; put me in a private box, and if I fall asleep come and shake me up when the farce begins."

Certainly this gentleman was not complimentary to our *corps dramatique*, but he was Fairfax's guest, and my orders were to offer him every attention. I took him, therefore, to the chief's own box, and left him there to sleep if he pleased, firmly resolved, however, that unless he snored loudly enough to interrupt the performance he might sleep till the next morning.

I had never seen "As You Like It," neither had Caroline. She sat next to me, and we both lost ourselves in the Forest of Arden and the fortunes of the hero and heroine, who played into each other's hands with a fervour and an artistic grace enchanting to behold—at least, to me—although I fear Caroline did not contemplate the process with so much equanimity.

I suppose I ought to have been jealous, but I knew Jack didn't love Clara, while Caroline was not altogether so sure of that.

Rosalind's love at first sight for Orlando, their after meeting in the forest, the ebullience of innocent

wantonness and animal spirits in which she absolutely revelled during the mock love-making, the ecstasy of passion which lighted her eyes, illumined her features, and appeared to thrill through her very veins at the coming and going of her young paladin, the fainting when Oliver recounts his brother's peril, and the delightful manner in which she spoke the epilogue, are all as fresh in my mind now as when I first saw and heard them.

I shall never forget her entrance as Ganymede.

She was indeed "Jove's own page."

Her gorgeous and glowing beauty, her superb and symmetrically formed limbs, her exquisitely undulating movements, the indolent grace with which she lounged about the forest, all combined to form a most perfect incarnation of statuesque grace and feminine loveliness.

I believe Herbert made an admirable Orlando, but I confess I had eyes for no one but "the fair, the chaste, the inexpressive she!"

Whether Clerehead slept during the early portions of the play I know not, but I do know he was wide awake enough when Clara came on in her boy's dress.

He sat eagerly forward, craning his long neck out of the box, and never took his eyes off her.

While she was speaking the epilogue I remained entranced, and Caroline sat quivering and moaning like a wounded doe.

As for him, the fellow looked for all the world as if he would have leaped upon the stage, and in the "sight of all Israel" have claimed the guerdon Rosalind proffered to "so many as had beards that pleased her," though apparently he thought better of it, for that time at any rate.

When the curtain fell Caroline gave a little shudder, and unconsciously murmured to herself, though loud enough for me to hear—

“He must love her! Who could help loving her, so happy, so beautiful? While I—”

Then the band struck up, and I heard no more.

“As when a well-graced actor leaves the stage,” so did “Don Cæsar de Bazan” appear to me a tedious, irrelevant, and impertinent burlesque; but I was in the minority, for the audience accepted the play and Bellhouse, who played the hero not only with fervour, but with enthusiasm.

Evidently Clerehead was favourably impressed also, for he engaged Bellhouse there and then at a very handsome salary, and a fortnight afterwards he left us to become *jeune premier* at the Frivolity.

That night Herbert and I were invited to meet the Metropolitan manager at supper at the Theatre House.

The invitation was made at his special request, in order that he might be introduced to Jack. The truth was, the astute *impresario* had been, to use his own elegant phraseology, “struck all of a heap” by both Clara and Herbert, and wanted to secure them both for the Frivolity.

Clara was at her best and brightest.

The great triumph she had achieved as Rosalind, Herbert’s association with it, the sympathetic ardour with which he had acted up to her, the perfect semblance of reality with which he had invested the amorous utterances of the love-sick Orlando, combined with a certain speechless but persuasive gallantry which exhaled from him unconsciously, and which was part of the man’s “loving, noble nature,” set her thinking.

"Could she have been mistaken about Caroline? Could he, after all—?"

Then she thought—

"Sufficient for the day is the evil (or happiness) thereof. Let me eat, drink, and be merry; to-morrow I may die!"

So she laid herself out to conquer, and when she was in that mood no woman could be so agreeable, so seductive, so dangerous, or so irresistible.

I had never seen her so charming before. Clerehead told me long after that he had never seen anyone so charming in his life.

Fairfax was delighted to see her so like her old self. I, alone, was the death's head at the feast.

It seemed very hard to know that the other girl was breaking her heart for Jack, that he loved neither of them, and that my latest glimpse of hope was fleeting away from before my eyes.

If he loved her, and if she could be happy, I could have borne it with patience, if not with equanimity; for, after all, what was I to stand between them and happiness?

In business Clerehead was a man of few words, and after supper he came straight to the point.

Without ceremony he offered Clara and Herbert their own terms, to commence as soon as Fairfax could spare them.

Now the truth was that the Frivolity had an evil odour in the "chief's" nostrils, and on no account would he permit his darling to be mixed up either with the theatre or the associations which surrounded it. So he gave a point blank negative; and Herbert, thanking Clerehead very much, followed suit.

Then we bade "good-night" to all, and wended our way homeward.

CHAPTER X.

THE LEGACY.

NEXT morning Fairfax turned out in pink with Clara ; and a little baronet (jocularly known as the "Gipsey"), who had been a comrade of ours in the Soudan, gave Jack a mount, so he rode to hounds with them, and a very distinguished trio they made.

I fear that Caroline was more impressed than gratified by the little cavalcade as she saw them ride by Precentor's Court, laughing and talking, evidently in the highest spirits ; while for my own part I must confess their laughter found no echo in my heart.

After I had counted my checks and written my letters I read the following remarkable advertisement in the *Times* :—

"If John Herbert, Esq., late Captain in the —th Lancers, will immediately communicate with Messrs. Gwynne, Griffith & Capper, solicitors, 63, Lincoln's Inn Fields, he will hear of something greatly to his advantage."

Without waiting for Herbert's return I telegraphed in his name, to this effect :

"Shall be glad to hear from you *in re* advertisement in to-day's *Times*."

An hour later I received a reply worded thus :—

"A legacy of £10,000 awaits you here. Kindly

come to town immediately, or place us in communication with your solicitors."

When Herbert returned from the hunting field I showed him the advertisement and the telegram.

He was for rushing off to Fairfax at once to obtain permission to get away that very night, but I dissuaded him, alleging that it might be a hoax, or some artifice of Clerehead's (who had the reputation of being a practical joker) to get him up to town in the hope of inducing him to accept the proposed engagement at the Frivolity. Besides, it was impossible for him to be out of the bill for the ensuing week. The programme was published, and I knew that no amount of persuasion could induce Fairfax to alter it. I wrote, therefore, by that night's post to my father's solicitor, desiring him to communicate with Messrs. Griffith & Capper, and to acquaint us with the result by wire.

Next day Mr. Stanton telegraphed me:—

"Have seen Griffith & Capper. Legacy quite *bonâ fide*. Your friend had better come up to town as soon as possible."

Herbert obtained a week's leave of absence upon important family business, and on Sunday afternoon he went to London.

Tuesday morning brought me the following letter:

"TAVISTOCK HOTEL,

"Monday.

"MY DEAR BOB,

"It's all true—there's no mistake about it. Your friend Stanton took me this morning to Griffith & Capper's, where a bright little Welshman (the very image of Lewis ap Griffith in Harold) told me that ten thousand pounds had actually been bequeathed

to me by a client of his, and who do you think it turned out to be? Why, Harry Armitage's father! The poor old boy died three months ago.

"The money is to be transferred to my account at Swan's bank, with as little delay as possible, and to-morrow I am to sign certain documents. Meanwhile, Stanton has opened an account for me at Glyn's, and I've a cheque-book, if you please. Only think—a cheque-book once more!

"I'm now off to dine with Clerehead, and to-night we are going to see the slender Sarah, with the voice of gold, in 'Hernani,' and Clerehead has promised to introduce me after the play. Better keep all this to yourself till I come back. Meanwhile, 'to the last syllable of recorded time,'

"Believe me, always your own old

"JACK."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PASSING OF FAIRFAX.

“But now, farewell! I am going a long way,
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly.”

I GOT Jack's letter, as I have said, on Tuesday, and on Wednesday—alas!

Let me think where and how to begin.

It was the first meet of the season with the Marquis of H——'s hounds.

Now, Fairfax's mare, having cast a shoe the previous night, was not “fit,” so he asked “The Gipse” to give him a mount.

Unfortunately, our little friend had in his stud a vicious beast, called “The Roarer.” The baronet rather liked to take it out of this brute, and whenever he got his knees into her ribs, she knew she had found her master.

I believe had Sir George got astride, the eternal devil, his Satanic Majesty, with all his host to aid him, couldn't have shaken him off. But then “The Gipse” barely turned nine stone, and was under thirty years of age, besides which he was the best horseman in the county. Now, Fairfax turned twelve stone ten, and was over fifty.

As ill-luck would have it, this infernal brute, full of corn and devilry, was selected by Sir George's loafing scoundrel of a groom for Fairfax's mount.

I was in attendance to take my instructions, as usual, for the day.

Generally "the chief" was bright and jovial; on this occasion I found him preoccupied and depressed. After we had finished our business, I ventured to observe—

"You seem rather unwell to-day, sir."

"Oh! I'm well enough in health, but I'm a little depressed in spirits, and I—" He started up and walked across the room once or twice; then facing me he inquired abruptly—

"Do you believe in ghosts, Bob?"

"I hope in them," I replied; "but I'm not quite sure of my belief in anything; I wish I were!"

"Once, ever so long ago, I thought I saw my mother, but my father persuaded me that it was an hallucination. My poor mother had promised if she ever could come back, that she would be sure to come to him, and as he had never seen her, he was convinced I had been dreaming. But why do you ask me, sir?"

"Because—because I believe in indigestion and nightmares—but I don't believe in ghosts, and yet—"

"Of course, you've heard all the rubbish about the Ghost Room and the White Lady?"

"I have."

"The very first night I slept there, a dear, dead friend appeared to me. I certainly thought I was awake, but what is it Hobbes says? 'To say one hath seen a vision or heard a voice is to say he hath dreamed

between sleeping and waking.' So I suppose I was dreaming.

"That was five years ago.

"This morning I dreamt that *She* came again to the foot of my bed. Looking upon me very sadly, she murmured in the soft, sweet voice I remember so well—

" 'Don't go out to-day, Frank—don't go out.'

"I heard her as clearly as I hear myself now. In the effort to reply, I awoke, and sprang out of bed. It was broad daylight, but I tell you, Penarvon, for one moment I saw Her as clearly as I see you now. Yes, there She stood, with her fair hair and her dark eyes, her white dress and black ribbons. As I approached She changed as if by magic into the figure of a nun, with a child in her arms. For a moment I stood awe-stricken, then I advanced, and *She, It*—what shall I call it? 'made itself air, into which she vanished!' Now, what do you think of that, Bob?"

"I think you are a little out of sorts. We were up rather late last night. Perhaps a touch of dyspepsia. If I were you I'd stay at home this morning. Let me send the horse back to Sir George. I'm sure you are not fit to go out."

"Not a whit," he replied, quoting Hamlet gaily and glibly. "'We defy augury—there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all.'" And so, with his usual buoyancy, he went forth.

Before he mounted, Clara said, "Papa, I don't like the looks of that mare."

"Nor I either," said I. "Just look at her ears; do let me send her back."

Whether through thoughtlessness, indolence, or mischief, the groom replied, "She's as right as a trivet, sir; Sir George rode her to hounds three days ago, and she went like a lamb."

Fairfax looked as if he himself didn't much like the appearance of the beast, but I suppose, after our conversation, he didn't care to show the white feather; anyhow he mounted, and away they went, apparently elate and confident, and a charming picture they made as they rode down the High Street.

I can see them now. She in her flowing habit, and he in his white hat, pink coat, a flower in his button-hole, well-cut boots and continuations.

I am not superstitious, but a presentiment of some impending calamity overshadowed me as they passed out of sight.

An hour later, as I returned from the Bank, I saw a group of stragglers coming towards the Theatre House, looking backwards at a waggon which was followed by an enormous crowd.

When the cart halted at the door, I looked beneath the tilt, and there I saw poor Fairfax extended at full length, his hunting dress all bestained and bedraggled with mire, his face wan and motionless, his eyes closed, his head resting on Her lap.

She sat behind him, her eyes fixed, her features ghastly pale, her beautiful hair all dishevelled and streaming over her.

The company being engaged with the rehearsal, were fortunately all on the spot. They came crowding down to assist in carrying the "chief" into the house.

Forgetful of everything but Clara's trouble, Caro

line sprang forward to assist her, but she shrank from her, and clung almost by instinct to me.

The "boys" carried our poor friend to the Ghost Room, where we undressed him and got him to bed before the doctor arrived.

During this time Clara had suffered Mrs. Brown to conduct her to her own room, where, taking off her riding habit, she slipped over her a loose dressing-gown. Then she came rapidly down, and dashing open the door, stood among us.

"Well?" she said to the doctor.

"Patience! my dear young lady, patience!"

"Preach patience to the winds," she exclaimed; "but tell *me* the truth—is it life or death?"

The doctor replied, "While there is life there is hope."

"Yes," she replied, bitterly, "much hope! I see it in your eyes. How long will he last? Is it to be to-day, or to-morrow, or next week? For God's sake, say when!"

The doctor hesitated before he answered.

"Since you insist upon knowing the truth, Miss Trevor, it may be a day, a week, or an hour. Meanwhile let us be thankful that he suffers no pain."

"Thank God for that! There is nothing more to be done, then?"

"Nothing."

"Thank you," she replied; "and now leave me, if you please, all except Mr. Penarvon."

I whispered the doctor to telegraph Herbert to come immediately, and then I sat with her through the long dreary night.

By degrees I learnt the truth from her disjointed exclamations.

They had not got clear of the city, and were descending a street paved with large granite stones—stones that were slippery and greasy.

Just at the very moment when both horses were struggling to keep their feet, Fairfax drew his white kerchief from his breast pocket, and as he flapped it out, a large plate-glass window opposite unfortunately reflected it. "The Roarer" caught sight of the reflection, shied, took the bit in her mouth, bolted to the right and over the bridge, as if a pack of wolves were at her heels.

Off she went, at a wild, mad gallop, and was out of sight in less than no time.

When Clara overtook them, half an hour later, she found Fairfax lying across the highway, speechless, senseless, his face quite rigid, his teeth clenched, the reins still in his hand, and "The Roarer" quietly browsing by his side.

After she had told me this, except for the tolling of the minster bell, which marked the progress of the hours, the silence was broken by nothing but the quiet breathing of the dying man. She had ceased to sob or moan, and merely sat beside him, her eyes fixed on his impassive face, pressing his hand in hers, and nursing it on her bosom.

Hour succeeded hour, until at length the great bell of the minster struck four—presently the chimes told us it was half-past the hour. The train from London was overdue!

Up to this moment Fairfax had not uttered a single word, but now, through the silence, his voice rose loud and clear—

"He's coming!" he cried. "Hush! hush! I hear his footsteps!"

I had not heard a sound to break the stillness of the dawning day, nor had she; but even as the words were uttered, Herbert, pale and breathless, stood upon the threshold.

The eyes which had been closed for hours now opened wide. As Herbert threw his arms around him he said, "Jack! dear old Jack! I always loved you from the first, and I couldn't die till I had seen you."

Turning to Clara, he continued, "My darling, kiss me! Yet again! When I meet your mother in Heaven I can tell her I have done my duty to her child."

Then he fell back upon his pillow, and was silent for a time.

Presently they heard him murmuring to himself, in a dreamy far-off way, "It was ever so long ago—we were boy and girl together—her hair was fair as morning, her eyes were dark as night—a white frock and black ribbons—"

He closed his eyes, and his breath came and went so regularly that it seemed to us as though he were sleeping.

Another hour! Another still!

The minster bell struck six; the sound appeared to have awakened him. Looking eagerly forward, and gazing into space, as if apostrophizing someone or something we could not see, he murmured—"I'm coming, darling, I'm coming."

And so he passed away, the old sweet smile upon his lips, while the bright eyes looked forth into the daylight where darkness never comes.

BOOK THE THIRD.

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CHAPTER I.

THE NEW MANAGER.

“The old order yieldeth to the new.”

THE day after the funeral Mr. Walton invited Herbert, myself, and Swan the banker, to meet him at his office to hear the will read.

Our poor friend died without kith or kin.

The will was short and simple. After some small legacies to his old friends and servants, to the infirmary, the School for the Blind, and the General Theatrical Fund, all his estate, real and personal, moneys in the bank at Rosemount and Castletown, together with his library, pictures, plate, linen, furniture, and all right and interest in the leases of the various theatres, were left absolutely to Clara.

There was a codicil to the will in which he expressed a desire that Herbert should continue the management of the circuit, paying her a royalty of £200 a year for five years, during which his leases had to run, and taking the scenery and fixtures at a valuation. These amounts were to be deducted from the receipts of the various theatres, on terms to be arranged by the executors, but the payments were not to commence until after the first twelve months of Herbert's tenancy, so that, had he found it desirable, he would have been

immediately placed in possession without payment of a single farthing.

Swan and Walton were appointed joint executors. After the will was read, Walton said—

“Now, Mr. Herbert, the rental of the theatres is going on, and the business must be settled at once. Come and see me to-morrow at twelve o’clock, and say, ‘yes’ or ‘no.’

Jack and I went home and talked the matter over, and the result was that the next day, to the astonishment of the lawyer, Herbert said—

“In accordance with Mr. Fairfax’s wishes, I will take the theatres; but, in view of Miss Trevor’s position, I should not like her to depend upon the failure or success of my speculations for payment. I will ask you, therefore, to get the valuation of the scenery and fixtures made out as soon as possible, and I will pay you the amount of the valuation and the goodwill at once. You can then invest the money for Miss Trevor, and it can immediately be put out at interest for her advantage.”

Walton gaped open-mouthed at this proposal, but managed to gasp out—

“Oh, yes, certainly; perhaps you will place me in communication with your solicitor?”

“By all means. Mr. Middleton will act for me, so kindly prepare the requisite agreements and send them to his office at once.”

The arrangements were speedily completed. The valuation came to £1,000; the goodwill to another £1,000.

After the legacies were paid there was barely £8,000 left, and Walton invested the £10,000 for Clara’s benefit.

Herbert took all existing engagements on his shoulders, and as we both thought it desirable to close the theatre for a short period after this sad event, he gave the company a fortnight's holiday, paying their salaries during the vacation.

He would have preferred closing altogether at Rosemount, but I advised him to re-open there; for Clara was very ill indeed, and I felt assured if we went away, leaving her alone to her sad thoughts, without friends or society, or the excitement of her professional duties, her malady would take a serious, perhaps a fatal turn; and, as the doctor confirmed my opinion, Herbert followed my advice, and we arranged to re-open at Rosemount.

During her illness Jack was unremitting in his attention and kindness. Every day he left the choicest flowers, the most delicious fruits; strange to say, however, she persistently refused to see him.

Good Mrs. Brown loved Clara very dearly, and cherished a deadly hatred for anyone who stood in her darling's way. It was enough for her that Caroline encroached upon Clara's parts, and more than enough that the former was becoming popular—too popular, in fact. Then, being an observing woman, the stupid old soul saw Clara's infatuation for Herbert, and could not realize how any sane man could look at Caroline while Clara was in existence.

To beguile the time for the invalid, she vented her spleen on her rival—"What Mr. Herbert could see in that designing hussy that he should go 'arming' her about, driving in cabs, and such like, she couldn't understand, not she, indeed!"

The well-meaning old idiot was not aware that

every word she spoke planted a dagger in Clara's heart.

Of course half she said was not true; but there was a certain element of truth in it, as I believe there is in nearly every other species of lie.

Her mischievous meddling, however, received confirmation in an unexpected manner.

It so happened that one morning as Jack left the Theatre House he met Caroline, who had called with a bunch of spring violets which she had gathered herself for Clara, and which she left with her card.

When Mrs. Brown took up the violets, she mentioned (not with the intention of making mischief, but merely to make talk) that Mr. Herbert and Caroline had left the house together.

Clara sprang out of bed, rushed to the window, saw them walking across the green towards the minster. That was "confirmation strong." She tore the card to fragments, and trampled the poor innocent, unoffending flowers beneath her feet. The reaction did her good; and next day the doctor said she was better.

As for Herbert's second peccadillo, he had been to Castletown on business, and on his return to Rosemount it was raining heavily, so he took a cab home.

Passing the Theatre House, he saw Caroline standing in the pit-passage, evidently driven there by stress of weather. What could poor Jack do but offer to give her a lift?

"Good Mother Brown" saw him assist Caroline into his cab, and, of course, retailed this incident with embellishments for Clara's delectation.

Although these petty jealousies stung the poor girl

almost to madness, they occupied her mind, and brought her back to the active duties of life.

One morning, when I made my accustomed call, to my astonishment Brown said—"Miss Clara would be glad to see you, Mr. Penarvon."

She was very sad and pale, but she came forward and shook hands with me warmly, as she said—"I see there is one friend left me still."

I replied—"You have many, Miss Trevor; there is Herbert—"

"Don't let us speak of him, if you please, Mr. Penarvon. Remember he is the manager, and we are only servants now; better realize our true position at once."

"Mr. Herbert will never look at the matter from that point of view, I feel assured."

"Never mind him. The doctor says if I am ever to get well I must have change of air, and exercise, and, indeed," she said, springing to her feet impatiently, "I can't stay here. They say the house is haunted, and it is—I know it is. I see *His* face everywhere—I hear his voice in every sound! I am not afraid of *Him*, but there's the Ghost Room and 'the White Ladye.' I lie awake at night, and hear strange noises, and see strange faces. I must get away at once, or I shall go mad!

"Will you ask the new manager, with my compliments, if he will let you come with me to London for, say, a fortnight, for I cannot go alone?"

I knew how fatal to the business my absence at such a time must be, but I also knew that I need not wait to ask Jack's consent—he would feel it a pleasure, a duty, to do anything, or everything, he could for the child of his benefactor.

It was arranged that we should go to town the next day ; so we telegraphed and secured rooms at a private hotel, in one of the streets off the Strand.

Though tired after the journey, the following morning Clara was better, and impatient to go out, but I made her rest.

The day after, however, I chartered a brougham for the fortnight of our stay, and took her for a drive daily.

She wanted to go to the theatres at night, but for the first week I would not hear of that. I kept her out in the open air from eleven until five, and took her to see everything that could interest her, and get her mind out of the old sorrowful grooves.

Every day she returned home healthfully fatigued, and every night by nine she retired to rest. The roses came back to her cheeks, her eyes began to light up and sparkle, and occasionally a smile came to her lips.

As our holiday was getting to an end, "Doctor," she said, "I must see the theatres before we return to Rosemount."

Clerehead had already sent us a box for the Frivolity, so we went to see "The Dragoons of Bagdad," a burlesque extravaganza, in five acts and sixteen spasms.

The first act consisted principally of doggerel, of which we could make neither rhyme nor reason—of music without melody, interpreted by a number of female vocalists without voices, who had evidently commenced the operation of dressing, and who had stopped about half-way up and nearly all the way down—and of two or three hoarse and gorilla-like buffoons, whose principal qualification for the actor's

art appeared to be the capacity to emit "obscene noises from filthy mouths."

The theatre was crowded with fashionable London.

The stalls were principally occupied by young men with "foreheads villainous low," and hair cropped like convicts, but who were, nevertheless, attired in the height of the prevailing fashion. Many of these noble youths slept placidly, eyeglass in eye and toothpick in mouth, and thus characteristically enjoyed the performance.

At the end of the first act Clara said, with a curious smile—

"I fear I'm not educated up to this standard. Don't you think we'd better go home, doctor?"

So home we went. Half an hour afterwards, however, she insisted on my taking her a drive along the Embankment.

Next night we went to the "Great International," where they were acting a wonderful drama with hansom cabs, real horses, a prison van, railway trains, a fire, and I don't know what else. A crude, bungling, old-fashioned composition, stupid, but honest; and though it made no pretence to art, it neither offended nor bored one.

We were amused as we recognised fine, old-crested situations hashed up as new ones, old-fashioned claptaps translated into modern platitudes, and dead and buried friends, that once did duty in carrotty wigs, green coats, flowered waistcoats, and continuations, exhumed and galvanized to life, in the garb of converted convicts and charitable cabmen.

The critics knew nothing about these transmogrifications, nor the public either; so why should we be

wiser than our neighbours? Altogether, we passed a pleasant, humdrum, harmless evening at the "Great International."

The manager came round to our box, and gushed at Clara, offered her an engagement there and then, and, in fact, would hardly take "nay" for an answer. She thanked him heartily, and promised if she did come to town, he should have the refusal of her services.

Every morning brought me a letter from Herbert and a play-bill. The play-bills she would insist on seeing, and I noticed that whenever Caroline was announced for one of her parts, especially the parts she had been accustomed to act with Herbert, she would become restless and irritable.

One morning came a bill of "Romeo and Juliet." As she crushed it in her hand involuntarily, as it seemed to me, she looked round rapidly, but I affected to be engrossed in the *Times*.

She then carefully spread out the bill, laid it flat on the table, went to the piano, and played, "Home they brought her warrior dead."

At last she said, abruptly—

"Doctor Penarvon, you have effected a cure; thank you so much. Now let us get back home. I shall be glad to see the old house once more. We were so happy there, and I am not the least bit afraid now, for I am strong again."

Next day we were on our way to Rosemount.

Herbert met us at the station on our arrival.

As ill-luck would have it, at that moment Caroline entered, and went to the bookstall (she was a subscriber to Mudie) to change a book. Now, though she didn't see us, we saw her. Clara declined Herbert's

proffered hand, bowed stiffly, passed by, and sprang into the cab which the thoughtful Brown had provided. It took five minutes or more to get the luggage loaded.

During that time, by pure accident, Herbert, returning to the city, encountered Caroline; and they were walking together over the bridge as we passed by them on our way to the Theatre House.

When we commenced our journey, Clara was joyous as a bird, bright as sunshine, full of pleasant memories, happy anticipations; yet the moment we arrived all was changed, and clouded by this unfortunate *rencontre*.

Again she became *distracte*, fractious, angry with everything and everybody.

After a few days' rest, she desired me to intimate officially to Herbert that she was anxious to resume her duties.

In accordance with her wishes, it was arranged that she was to open as Pauline in "The Lady of Lyons."

There was great curiosity to see her, and she was received by a crowded house with an enthusiasm which visibly affected her, and indeed, I was afraid she would have broken down; but presently she rallied, and returned to the charge with ardour.

I don't think, up to that period, I had, except upon the night of "Damon and Pythias," ever seen an audience so excited as they were on that occasion in the fourth act of this play.

The criticasters and other small fry of literature who detest the excellence they are unable to comprehend or emulate, may vie with each other as to which of them shall cast most mud upon the grave of Edward Lytton Bulwer, but when any one of them, or all of them combined, can write anything (despite its occa-

sional inflation) half so tender, so poetic, and dramatic as "The Lady of Lyons," it will be time to heed their small impertinences. Meanwhile they may pass for what they are worth, "but," as Othello says, "that's not much."

After her reappearance Clara resumed her old position, but she was colder to Herbert and more repellent to Caroline than ever, who, finding every friendly advance repelled, met coldness with disdain.

Poor Jack on his part, perceiving himself persistently misunderstood by both ladies, found his safest refuge in assuming an attitude of friendly neutrality.

Decidedly things were getting into a bad way.

The rivals met daily, hourly, were punctiliously polite and ceremoniously courteous to each other.

War as yet had not been openly declared, but it was impending and imminent. They could no longer conceal from themselves that they hated each other instinctively—hated with the unreasoning, illogical, and burning hatred known only on the stage, and then only amongst women who are not only rivals in ambition, but rivals in love.

I looked on with increasing anxiety, for I saw where the hidden fires of jealousy lay smouldering, waiting but one spark to kindle them, and ready, give them vent, to burst into a flame which, in its fury, might consume them both.

The spark fell at last.

It was the hand of Boanergus that innocently fired the train.

Honest Joe had an offer from the manager of the Great International, and was about to leave our company.

Of course, he claimed his Benefit, and one morning, when Jack and I were arranging the programme for the ensuing week, Joe came to consult us about the pieces to be acted on the occasion.

Seven years before, Boanergus had opened in the part of Clytus, in poor mad Nat Lee's bombastic tragedy of "The Rival Queens." In Clytus his star had arisen—in Clytus his star should set.

In vain did Herbert point out the obsolete absurdity of the play.

That play Joe would have—that, and no other !

" Besides, sir," said he, " the piece has not been acted for seven years, and it is remembered to this day that I knocked everybody out of sight on my first appearance. Then see what a ' bill ' it makes—

" ' The Rival Queens ; or, The Death of Alexander the Great ! ' "

" There is the entrance of Alexander into Babylon, in his triumphal car drawn by milk-white steeds. The car is in the theatre, and only wants furbishing up with a book or two of Dutch metal. My friend, the Gipsy, has promised the loan of his pair of grays. It's true they're dashed with ginger, but that's near enough. The Chorus of the Philharmonic Society have proffered to come and sing ' See the Conquering Hero comes ' for your entrance into Babylon, and ' Plumpy Bacchus with Pink Eyne ' for the banquet.

" Then look at the cast ! You, sir, as Alexander—Miss Trevor and Miss Challoner for the Queens. It is my private opinion, Mr. Herbert, that if Alexander had had two Queens like those on his hands he'd have had enough to do to keep them in order in this world, without sighing for new ones to conquer."

"My dear Boanergus, you are an ass, and talk of things you don't understand. Let us confine ourselves to the piece. It is such intolerable rot, the audience will yell at it. Have you ever read it?"

Boanergus replied with promptitude and dignity—

"Sir, I read the 'Morning Post' daily. I must keep up my acquaintance with the fashionable world. Except this, I never read anything but my own part and my cues, and I defy any man to say that Joe Boanergus is not always 'letter-per.' As for the piece, my impression is that it is a be-ewtiful piece."

"Beautiful! Good God, sir! It's burlesque and bunkum run mad! David Garrick was the greatest genius of his age, but 'all the King's horses and all the King's men' could never induce him to make a fool of himself in Alexander."

"Ah, Mr. Herbert, that shows how 'cute he was. Davy, you know, was a little chap."

"So was Alexander—the real Alexander—and he squinted."

"I don't know anything about the real Alexander. My researches have not led me much into ancient history, but if the Alexander of the stage is an inch less than six feet, he's an impostor. As to his squinting, that might be an advantage, because he can look two ways at once—one eye on each Queen. But I'm sure no one could understand the Rival Queens kicking up such a row about a chap of five feet nothing. No, sir; Alexander should be a man, sir—a man, and *you* are that man!"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. Would any man in his senses utter such rubbish as this?—

“ ‘Keep down, ye rising sighs,
And murmur in the hollow of my breast ;
Run to my heart and gather more sad winds,
That, when the voice of fate shall call you forth,
Ye may at once rush from the seat of life,
Blow the blood out, and burst like a—BLADDER!’ ”

“ Well, Mr. Herbert, I think he might get over the ground without bursting his bladder, though mind you, the Bard himself doesn’t disdain the aid of a useful bladder or two occasionally—or ‘little wanton boys that swim on ’em either, for the matter of that. But since you object to it, blow the bladder—I mean, cut it out. Cut it to ribbons, sir—cut everything but *my* part. I can’t have a line of that touched.”

“ Well, ‘I’ll do’t, but it dislikes me.’ How about the after-piece ? ”

“ Suppose we say ‘The Octoroon,’ sir ? ”

“ Good heavens ! What time do you expect to be done ? ”

“ Sir, it is my Benefit—my farewell to the scene of early triumphs, and my patrons like to have their money’s worth. Besides, we can cut out the last act, and finish with the Ship on Fire.”

“ Very well—very well ; only tell them they had better bring their nightcaps with them.”

“ Ah ! Mr. Herbert, you will have your little joke. But I must be off. I have to call on the Mayor and the Colonel of the Yeomanry for their ‘bespeak.’ I suppose you have no objection ? ”

“ Yes, I have ! I have the profoundest objection to the degrading custom. This beastly ‘bespeak’ is a relic of the dark ages. For my part I’d as lieve ask for a ticket for soup as for a ‘bespeak.’ The public are our patrons, and if we please them they don’t wait

to be asked to come to the play. However, it's your Benefit, not mine, so do as you like."

"Sorry we don't see things in the same light, but everyone to his trade. I am an actor and you are a gentleman. That makes all the difference."

"It oughtn't to make the slightest difference, Joe. Every actor should be a gentleman; in fact, the terms actor and gentleman ought to be synonymous. Good-morning, Boanergus," and so he rang the bell.

When Herbert's man came in, Joe inquired—

"May I ask Foley to call a coach—no, a cab, I mean?"

"No, no, a coach; call things by their proper names, Boanergus. Foley," he continued—

"Go, call a coach, and let a coach be call'd,
And let the man that calls it be the caller!
And in his calling let him nothing call
But Coach! Coach! Coach!
A coach, then, for the bold Bonurgus!"

"There, Joe, that's neat and appropriate, and just after the fashion of your leather-lunged friend Alexander the Asinine."

Boanergus, silent, but not convinced, sallied forth to look up his Colonel and his Mayor, while I went to the bank.

Herbert never did things by halves, so instead of the scissors he took the knife, or rather the pruning hook, and cut and slashed "The Rival Queens" to such an extent that "if the peaceful dead have any sense of the vile injuries done to the living," poor Nat Lee must have had a bad time of it down there "among the dead men" during the rehearsals of his unfortunate play.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIVAL QUEENS.

“ROXANA.—Come, give me back his heart,
And thou shalt live empress of all the world.
STATIRA.—The world is less than Alexander's love.”

THE eventful night had arrived, big with the fate of Babylon and Boanergus.

Joe was right in his anticipations; there was an enormous house, attracted partly by his flaming programme and partly by his popularity, but principally, as I think, by the partisans of Clara and Caroline.

The dear, stupid public, accustomed to see Herbert always acting the lover to these young ladies, arrived at the conclusion that he must be really “gone” on one or both of them; else how could he make love so divinely? Of course it was a foregone conclusion that they were both madly “gone” on him, and therefore mortally hated each other.

It was understood that in this particular play he had set up a Mormon establishment, and therefore, as a natural consequence, there would be a bullying match, and a free fight as to who should retain the proprietorship of the bigamous hero.

Nor was this an exceptional phase of public feeling; only let an actor and an actress be seen to act continually together, especially in love-stories, and all the

young people in the audience accept as gospel that "He" is in love with "Her," and "She" with "Him."

Herbert's duties were so absorbing, and his ambition so engrossing and so insatiable, that I don't think these absurd rumours ever reached him. He was a sort of Grand Lama of Thibet, after a small fashion, and no one ever dared to take a liberty with him, especially a liberty of that kind. I remember once, however, that a man at the Club asked him an insolent question in connection with a certain lady, and that, in reply, he beckoned the fellow outside, and there and then caned him within an inch of his life.

After that people were very chary of asking Jack impertinent questions.

Denuded of yards of fustian, which disfigure Lee's bombastic play, there are fine lines and strong situations; these given with the player's "noble frenzy," on this night at least, gave the audience no time for reflection.

The drama was well cast, well acted, and well dressed; above all, it was played with quickness and spirit, and it was received with positive enthusiasm.

There was only one drawback.

Poor Boanergus, in "pushing his Benefit" with his distinguished friends, had got his "cargo aboard." When he made his first appearance he had a splendid reception, and when he went off, he thought he'd keep himself primed for the banquet, so he continued to imbibe "potations pottle deep."

Statira (Caroline) had a most cordial welcome, but when Herbert entered as Alexander in his triumphal car (horses and all), I thought the house would have come down about our ears,

Roxana (Clara) does not make her appearance until the third act.

I think the people had begun to despair of seeing her, and hence, when she appeared thus late in the play, she had the most enthusiastic reception of the night.

When the Rival Queens confronted each other, and began to exchange compliments of an emphatic character, the audience displayed eager anticipation, but were evidently disappointed when they found the interview terminated with only a little tall talking.

At length came the banquet. The noble Clytus was by this time "o'er all the ills of life victorious."

'Tis true, the good old Greek was supposed to be really *Bacchi plenus*, but Joe had "snatched a grace beyond the reach of art," and was, in fact, so 'screwed' that he could scarcely keep his feet. He rolled from side to side, and roared out his lines from the bottom of his boots—sandals I should say. Nearly every word he uttered kept the audience in a roar, to the infinite disgust of Herbert, for drunkenness was the only fault of humanity to which he was utterly intolerant.

At last things reached a climax when Clytus said—

"Philip fought men—but Alexander, women."

At this taunt "young Ammon" leaped from his throne to the banquet table, exclaiming—

" ' Women !

Was I a woman, when at Oxydrace
I planted at the walls a scaling-ladder,
And mounted, spite of showers of stones, bars, arrows,
And all the lumber which they thundered down—
When you beneath cried out, and spread your arms
That I should leap amongst you, did I so ? "

The climax of absurdity was reached by Clytus re-

plying, with drunken gravity—"Dread sire, you *did!*"

Everybody, audience and actors included, burst into a Gargantuan roar of laughter at this ridiculous *non sequitur*; that is, everybody except Herbert, whose anger rose to fury as, snatching up a javelin, he put an end to Clytus's folly and his life at once.

Seeing that under the circumstances it would be inappropriate to waste time in maudlin lamentations over the defunct and drunken veteran, Tony Aston, the stage manager, sent Eumenes on to tell of Statira's peril.

When Alexander heard the direful tidings he sprang to his feet and rushed off to save his love, exclaiming—

" ' All draw your swords, on wings of lightning move;
Young Ammon leads you, and the cause is love.
When I rush on, sure none will dare to stay,
'Tis beauty calls, and glory leads the way! ' "

whereupon the applause was deafening.

From this moment the play went like a whirlwind to the end; a strange excitement was in the air, an excitement which culminated in the final passage-at-arms between the Rival Queens.

As the two women encountered each other, their superb beauty, enhanced by their magnificent and characteristic costumes, formed a physical and picturesque contrast as unique as it was remarkable.

The situation of the scene, the very words they uttered, transported them beyond themselves into another age, another world; they were no longer Clara and Caroline—they were Roxana and Statira, both loving the same man, each hating the other, and throw-

ing the burning intensity of her own nature into the poet's lines.

It had ceased to be acting; it had become a terrible reality. Their eyes sparkled with jealous rage, their bosoms palpitated with the fury which their countenances could no longer conceal.

Thus opposed, each ready to rush upon her enemy and join in the death-struggle, they stood, defying and defiant.

At this moment "the luckless cause of all their woes" was heard without. At the sound of his voice Roxana sprang upon Statira, and, unsheathing her dagger, with a wild cry of vengeance plunged it into her detested rival's bosom!

Through the crowded theatre rang a shrill, piercing cry of agony, which thrilled through every heart, and the whole house surged in a wild commotion as Alexander bounded on the stage.

For one moment, only one, Roxana brandished the avenging poniard aloft in triumphant exultation; the next she encountered Statira's reproachful eyes. Then what horror was it struck the unhappy Queen motionless and dumb?

The fatal weapon dropped from her nerveless grasp; its sharp point, as it fell, penetrated the stage fully an inch deep.

There the hateful thing remained, erect and quivering, the jewels in its heft glittering in the light like the eyes in a serpent's head preparing for its deadly spring.

The agonized face of the dying Statira might have been transformed to that of Medusa, for as she sank senseless in her royal lover's arms it seemed as if her

expiring glance had petrified her victorious rival into stone !

I must explain at once what had occurred. Before the last act had commenced Clara asked Bassett, the property man, for the "trick" dagger, used for Juliet and Othello. In this weapon the blade recoils with a spring into the handle, so that when the supposed fatal blow is struck it presents the appearance of really entering the bosom of Juliet or Othello, when, in fact, they are not even scratched with it. Now, Mr. Bassett, after the custom of his kind, had been doing honour to Boanergus's Benefit in copious libations of "cold without," and the drunken brute had thrust into Clara's hand at the last moment prior to her going on the stage a *real* dagger instead of a *trick* one !

The curtain had already rung up. The cue was given for her entrance, and in her haste she had no time to examine the weapon ; hence, when she *pretended* to stab her rival, to her consternation she found that she had *really* done so !

There she stood, convulsed and horror-stricken, and there lay Caroline almost lifeless in Herbert's arms.

Tony took stock of the situation at once, and closed the scene like lightning on this novel and unexpected tableau. By great good fortune I happened to be at the wing, and, snatching Caroline from Herbert, I thrust him on the stage for his last scene.

He told me afterwards he felt that something was wrong, though what it was he did not know till the play was over. He was impressed with the consciousness of some impending calamity, but he had his double duty as actor and manager to fulfil, and he did it.

He had never played this part before ; he had the

words to think of! he had to act the scene in a position not contemplated at the rehearsal. He had to bring the play to a triumphant conclusion, yet all the time he heard Statira's dying cry, saw Roxana's remorseful face, and the fatal dagger quivering at her feet!

Meanwhile I had carried Caroline to her dressing-room. Clara, who had followed like one dazed, at length awoke to the full horror of the situation. She cast herself on her rival with tears and cries, with prayers and lamentations. Amidst her passionate abandonment Herbert entered the room with the doctor, who had been sent for.

This gentleman examined Caroline's wound, and said portentously—

"H'm! a narrow escape."

"But say, sir, that there's no danger; for Heaven's sake say that!" exclaimed Clara.

"There is great danger—great danger, madam," he replied.

"Oh! God!" cried the unhappy girl, "what have I done! How can I ever forgive myself?"

"Penarvon," said Herbert, "don't you think you had better see Miss Trevor to her dressing-room?"

The cold and almost cruel tone of his voice recalled Clara to herself. She saw in that moment that henceforth his heart was closed to her, if, indeed, it had ever been open; so, without another word, she suffered me to take her hand and lead her forth. I conducted her across the stage to the corridor of the Theatre House, down which she glided away in the semi-darkness, till she passed out of my sight and vanished like "The White Lady" herself.

Returning to the stage in no very amiable mood, I

encountered the property man whose negligence had been the cause of this calamity. The great hulking ruffian was reeling drunk, and brutally insolent, so I did myself the pleasure of helping him down the stairs, and then propelled him, with the aid of my boot and my sound leg, from one end of the pit passage to the other, and so on to the gutter at the opposite side of the street.

We kept Caroline in her dressing-room till the performance was over, and the audience and actors had left the theatre.

Our object was to avoid publicity as much as possible, so Herbert and I, and the master carpenter, accompanied by the doctor, wrapped her up carefully and carried her to Precentor's Court on the Hamlet bier.

Further examination proved that the dagger's point had fortunately glanced on the steel busk of her corsage, else she would not have escaped with life. As it was, the wound was a serious one, and required the utmost care and attention.

This unfortunate event took place on Friday. Saturday was the last night of the season at Rosemount.

On Monday the Italian Opera Company opened at Whitetown, and I had to go there to superintend affairs, while Herbert and the rest of the company were to open in Castletown on the same night with "Hamlet."

Of course it was a serious drawback not to have Caroline for the opening performance; but imagine my consternation, upon arriving at the theatre for the purpose of holding treasury on Saturday at midday, to learn that Clara was *non est*. Subsequently we learnt

from the doctor that she had called upon him apparently in a state of great anxiety of mind, at nine o'clock that morning to enquire as to Caroline's condition. When informed that she was out of danger, Clara was much relieved, and returning direct to the Theatre House, told Brown "she was going to London and should never again return ; that as soon as she was settled she would communicate with him as to the disposal of the plate, linen, pictures, furniture, &c., in the Theatre House."

She paid him a year's wages, kissed Mrs. Brown, and cried a good deal. Then she went to the station, where she had two minutes' private conversation with old Titus, the station-master, who attended on her as if she were a Princess of the Blood.

A grand saloon had been to the north with some royal personages. To this spacious and palatial carriage, Titus conducted Clara, and locked the door. He posted on the window an "engaged" label, and gave the guard strict injunctions to release her for lunch at Peterboro', but otherwise to keep the doors locked, and on no account to permit any second person to enter the carriage ; and then the old man, who had met her the first night she ever came to Rosemount, and who loved her dearly as he had loved Fairfax long before, kissed her, and said, "God bless you, my bonnie dearie," and stood looking at her, and after her, with tearful eyes until the train passed out of sight.

There was no letter, no message—no, not one word.

Yes, there was a bunch of "forget-me-nots" left for me. That was all. I took the flowers with trembling hand from Brown, affecting unconcern ; but, oh !

when I was alone with my treasure I pressed them to my lips; I moistened them with tears of joy and gratitude to think that I was not wholly forgotten—nay, more, that she had asked me, by those speechless but eloquent messengers, not to forget her. I have those poor flowers still—faded, withered, it is true, but always fresh in my heart now as then.

Herbert was hurt, and I admit justly, at her abrupt departure. It was an inexcusable and utterly unjustifiable violation of all professional etiquette, and might have been attended with serious, if not fatal, consequences.

In the emergency little Fanny Heathcote, the *soubrette* of the company, got through Ophelia decently, and Miss Netherton played the Queen; but of course the public would not accept them as adequate substitutes for Clara and Caroline, and their absence had a most injurious effect on the prospects of the season at Castletown.

A month elapsed, and still we heard no tidings of my poor darling.

At length the news came through the London papers that she had opened at the Great International in Juliet, and had taken the town by storm.

I sent her a laurel wreath and a bouquet of flowers, but received no acknowledgment.

All then was over between us; thenceforth my heart bled in silence, but I bore my cross as best I might.

CHAPTER III.

PLIGHTED TROTH.

“ So rush’d, mix’d, melted, life with life united !
Lips, cheeks burn’d, trembled—soul to soul was won !
And earth and heaven seem’d chaos, as delighted,
Earth—heaven was blent round the beloved one.”

CAROLINE rapidly recovered health and strength.

It was apparent at last that Herbert loved her ; his love had been growing and ripening until it burst into life on the night of “ The Rival Queens.”

“ The pity of it,” her peril, her innocence, her helplessness, her unprotected loveliness, all these combined to create a passion so intense and absorbing that he grew to live in the light of her eyes, to hunger for the music of her voice, to feel that life was not worth living without her. As for her, her heart had gone out of her keeping the very night she first beheld him ; to her he had ever been the man of men, the quintessence of all that was manly, and chivalrous, and noble, and tender true.

For some time they must have read each other’s hearts, though no word had left their lips to bind their lives.

At length the supreme moment came.

The coincidences in the lives of these two women were more than strange. Clara opened in London on

the very night that Caroline made her first appearance after her recovery in Castletown.

The play was Tom Taylor's noble drama "Clancarty." It was then acted for the first time in the company, and it was a revelation to all concerned—actors and audience.

We were crowded to overflowing in front, and after the first act I was privileged by Tony to stand in the prompt entrance.

They had reached the great situation in the third act, in which the supposed Captain Heseltine, escaping from his pursuers, amidst a shower of bullets, gains shelter and sanctuary in Lady Clancarty's chamber, where he reveals to her that he is not Heseltine, but her own true and loyal husband, whom she has never seen since they parted, years before, boy and girl at the altar.

There is a picture of Leighton's—a man and a maiden are clinging to each other. They are clad in the garb of some remote classic age. She is fair, he is dark. Her dewy eyes, half closed, look through their long lashes up to his in the very ecstasy of innocent love; her chaste lips, quivering with virgin ardour, are uplifted for the nuptial kiss. The two figures standing on the stage—save that she is dark and he is fair, and that they are attired in the costume of a later time—crystallize the poetry of that picture into life for me.

Even while the idea flashed through my mind, Caroline puts it into words as she murmurs in softest music—"Now take me to your arms and kiss me as bridegroom kisses bride." The divine light of love leaped from her eyes into his; she sank into his arms,

he laid his lips on hers, and with that first kiss of love their lives were concentrated to each other. More than twice a thousand eyes were on them, but she could see only his—he could see only hers; they were oblivious of everything save that they loved and were beloved.

A long explanatory scene had to follow, in which Clancarty should relate how he had effected his escape. I saw it was useless to expect him to speak it, so, much to Tony Aston's indignation, I took the liberty of sending Lady Betty Noel on the stage to bring the lovers back from Heaven to St. James's Square.

The remainder of "Clancarty" passed unnoted by me, for I saw the play within the play, and I rejoiced at their happiness though mine was gone for ever.

Some weeks later Jack showed me two small and beautifully executed miniatures, mounted in brilliants and set in locketts of gold; the one was of Caroline, the other of himself. She had painted them both. As likenesses they were striking, as works of art they were really admirable.

"Not bad likenesses, are they, Bob?" he said.

One of these locketts was made in a peculiar fashion; it was attached to a gold neck-chain, and so arranged that it could be worn as a brooch. I noted that from that time forth Caroline always wore it about her neck.

Although it was an open secret that they were engaged to each other, no time as yet was fixed for their marriage.

As for Clara, I eagerly followed the records of her career in town, and rejoiced to find that (though every

triumph removed her farther from me) success followed success; in fact she was the celebrity of the season.

At length she sent for her books, music, plate, pictures, &c., and the old Theatre House where we had passed such happy hours with her and our dear, dead friend, was dismantled and untenanted save by the ghosts of the dead but forgotten past.

“The White Ladye” had it all to herself now.

CHAPTER IV.

FAILURE.

"The vices and the virtues are written in a language the world cannot construe; it reads them in a vile translation, and the translators' names are failure and success."

Time passed quickly and pleasantly for all—but me.

Herbert and Caroline had found the "golden grain in the dull sand of life." Clara had reached the goal of her artistic ambition. I alone was without one gleam of hope, for wherever she was not, life was but as a barren desert.

It was perhaps as well for me, in my then state of mind, that a change took place in my position. Tony Aston, who was never the same man after Fairfax's death, sent in his resignation, and went on the Drury Lane fund, to the benefits of which he was entitled, having served his three years in the National Theatre before I was born.

From the very moment I joined the company, I had attached myself to the old man, and assisted him in making his prompt-books, copying his plots, &c., and had gone in to study the *technique* of stage management with him. Now "virtue was its own reward." When he left us he bequeathed me his entire collection of marked books, plots, music cues, and playbills,—a collection as complete and comprehensive, as it is

unique and unrivalled. When Herbert ultimately asked me to assist him in the stage management, I jumped at the proposal.

For a considerable period the various theatres progressed most satisfactorily. Herbert's military training now stood him in good stead; he knew how to command as well as to obey. A strict disciplinarian, he kept everybody and everything in perfect order, a terror to the idle and dissolute, but beloved by all who knew their duty and did it.

Most of the distinguished authors and actors were his most intimate friends, and as for young beginners, why he was the tutelary divinity of undiscovered geniuses.

So far his management was triumphantly successful. But alas! all was not to remain *couleur de rose*. Clouds were gathering in the distance.

The theatre at Castletown was too small for the continually increasing population, and in an evil moment he was induced to invest the greater portion of his remaining capital in a new building, which was, indeed, an ornament to the town, furnished as it was with every modern improvement, and far in advance of most of the Metropolitan theatres of that period.

We opened our new theatre with a revival of "Hamlet."

Finding no reliable archæological authorities, Herbert gave his fine taste unlimited scope. Caroline, who sketched admirably, and had a rare eye for colour, designed most of the costumes. The production was distinguished for so much splendour and good taste that the play had a prolonged run, and we made a great deal of money as well as *kudos* by it.

A celebrated dramatist and art critic (who was indebted to us for the production of one of his plays, which the London managers wouldn't look at, though afterwards it achieved a great success in town!) came down to our first night, and was so much struck with the performance that he induced a rising R.A. of great ability to come and see it also. The young painter was enraptured, and persuaded Herbert and Caroline to sit to him for a life-sized study of the parting of Hamlet and Ophelia in the third act.

He seized the moment when Ophelia, returning the gifts to Hamlet, exclaims—

“ Their perfume lost
Take these again ; for, to the noble mind,
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.”

The painter barely sketched in the outlines of the figures and their surroundings, but he finished the two heads. They were magnificent studies. Herbert's expressive features and leonine front were relieved by a profusion of long, waving, golden hair, which contrasted admirably with Caroline's wistful, pale face, and abundant raven locks.

At the end of the run of the play we sent a large photograph of the scene, together with a couple of cabinet pictures of Hamlet and Ophelia, to enable the painter to complete the work at his leisure.

Our first season was a triumphant success, but “one swallow doesn't make a summer,” and several successful seasons were essential to enable Herbert to recoup himself for his large outlay.

He was not a good financier, nor, to be frank, was I either.

The success of “Hamlet,” I regret to say, induced

him the following season, contrary to my advice, to launch out into other poetic revivals of a less popular character, notably one of a dull, dry Roman play, which was attended with great labour and expense, and resulted in a loss of many thousands of pounds. To remedy one imprudence he committed several others. He began to neglect his acting, and to rush into numerous wild-goose speculations—*par exemple*, he annexed a large theatre in Scotland, and he also took one in Lancashire. This necessitated large outlays, incessant labour, and continual travelling to and fro; indeed, towards Christmas he almost lived on the railways. At the end of the third year of our management the financial look-out was very dark indeed. Trade was in a deplorable condition.

We were relying on our pantomimes to retrieve our heavy losses, and Herbert didn't contemplate the prospect with much equanimity, inasmuch as he had a most profound contempt for this class of entertainment, and still greater disdain for the blockheads who came to see it.

To emphasize his opinion at Christmastide his play-bills were thus contemptuously headed—

“ANNUAL FEAST OF FOLLY!”

followed by this significant quotation—

“See'st thou not what a deformed thief this Fashion is?”

In the year 188—our “Feasts of Folly” were in full blast of preparation at four different theatres, involving an outlay of many thousands of pounds, and, if successful, realizing many thousands of profit—if unsuccessful, ruin!

The preparations had progressed favourably enough,

and by a judicious transposition of dates it was so arranged that the "master" might be present at the first night in each town.

The Scotch pantomime was produced a week prior to Christmas, that in Lancashire the following Wednesday, the one at Rosemount on Christmas Eve, and at Castletown (where I was located) on Boxing-night.

Ten days before the production of the Scotch pantomime, the great local bank "burst up" with a crash, involving the whole community in general ruin. Consequently the Scotch speculation was doomed before it saw the footlights.

"Misfortunes never come singly."

The pantomime at Rosemount was "cooked" by a drunken ruffian of a carpenter, who bolted at the last moment, having previously "fouled" the ropes and deranged the machinery so thoroughly that, on the opening night, not a single scene worked properly. Of course this was remedied after two or three performances, but the mischief was done and was irremediable.

The Lancashire affair was more fortunate, and yielded two or three thousand pounds profit, while as for ours at Castletown—

CHAPTER V.

JIMMY GREEN.

“Only a clown, my masters, only a clown.”

“JOLLY little Jimmy Green,” and “the renowned Signor Tomaso Schmiderini” (born Smith), were engaged as our clown and harlequin. They were strangers, and approached Herbert with fear and trembling, but his gracious manner soon put them at their ease, and as they were both clever and industrious, their portion of the business was speedily and admirably arranged.

The dress rehearsal of the opening scenery, &c., was over; in fact, everything was ready except the harlequinade, which required polishing up a little, and was therefore “called” for ten o’clock on the morning preceding Christmas Day.

There had been an awful snowstorm the night before, the like of which had not occurred within the memory of man.

Although I only lived a mile from the theatre it took me an hour to get down.

Now there was a family of itinerant players, known for some generations in Yorkshire and Lancashire, highly respectable, industrious, decent people, whose only idea was to live honestly by their humble calling, to pay their way, and save a little for a rainy day.

They travelled with their own wooden theatre, and acted in small towns, at wakes, fairs, &c.

As we were about to commence our rehearsal, the porter came and told me that Tom Wylder, the head of the sept, was in the hall, and wanted to see Herbert.

Poor Tom was in sore tribulation; they had erected their little theatre at Barford, had got their bills out, and had completed their arrangements for opening with their pantomime on Boxing-night, when in consequence of the snowstorm their primitive building had come down with a run.

Herbert did not wait to hear any more; he dismissed the rehearsal until night, ordered Ruston, the master carpenter, and all his men to take their tools and the first train for Barford, and place themselves at the disposal of Wylder. The poor fellow was overcome with emotion, and with tears running down his honest face, he exclaimed—

“Mesther John, if ever I forget this, I wish that the Almighty may forget me!” and he never did forget it.

With the aid of the poor show people, who worked with a will, Wylder’s “Temple of Thespis” was soon re-erected, and our men returned in time for the night rehearsal.

The harlequinade was rapidly run through. Everything was finished. There had been only one hitch; the renowned Tomaso—no, let me call him Tom Smith—had to turn a hand-spring, and he was not *au fait* at the trick.

“Try back,” said Herbert.

Tom did “try back,” but he couldn’t manage the hand-spring cleanly.

There was no one left in the theatre but the clown, the harlequin, the gasman, Herbert, and myself.

Jimmy Green was at the wing taking off his practising shoes, and putting on a pair of heavy boots.

He had just finished lacing his ankle jacks when he sprang up. "Look here," says he, "I'll show you how to 'fake' it; this is how it's done, old man;" and suiting the action to the word, up went Jimmy, heels over head, and came down on his feet "like a load of bricks." But though he alighted on his feet the next moment he was on his back with his face as white as death, and the cold sweat streaming from his forehead.

Quick as lightning Herbert had the poor clown in his arms.

"Cheer up, little man, cheer up," says he; "you're not hurt much?"

"Not much," says Jimmy, with a ghastly attempt at a smile, "I've only made a star trap of my knee, that's all, sir. It's them beastly boots as done it."

"I'm so sorry," says Tom; "it's all my blooming stupidity."

"Never mind, old man," replies Jimmy, "you couldn't help it; we can't all be born acrobats, you know."

"Perhaps it's not so bad as you think," says the manager; "let's have a look at the knee." So saying, he removed Jimmy's "tights," and sure enough his right knee-cap was smashed to pieces.

In a very grave voice Herbert says to me, "Bob, see if my trap is at the door."

"All right," says I.

"Come along then, Mr. Green," says Herbert, "it's

rather late " (it was about two in the morning), " but I daresay they'll let us in at the Infirmary."

" But what's to become of the pantomime, sir, and who's a-goin' to play clown ? " says Jimmy.

" Never mind about that," replies Herbert, pleasantly. " If the worst comes to the worst I'll play clown myself, so that's all right. Give a hand, boys. There you are, my man ! "

And we lifted poor Jimmy, as tenderly as if he were a baby, into Herbert's brougham, and so the strange group, clown, harlequin, Herbert, and myself, started for the Infirmary.

Jack was a liberal patron of this magnificent institution (it was the finest in the North), and his name was a passport at all hours.

If the poor clown had been the Prime Minister he could not have been treated with greater kindness and courtesy.

The injured knee was examined, and we all awaited the verdict with great anxiety.

" H'm ! It's a bad case," says the doctor.

" I hope I'll be able to play clown in a fortnight, sir," says Jimmy.

" My poor little man," says the doctor, tenderly, " you'll never play clown again."

" Oh ! my poor wife and bairns," sobs Jimmy.

" Don't trouble about them, Mr. Green," Herbert replies. " I'll look after them."

" God bless you, sir ! " gasps the poor clown, and falls back.

" He's fainted," says Tom.

" So much the better. Mrs. Jones," says the doctor to the nurse, " there's a decanter of old port in the

cellaret in my room. Go and bring it, and look alive."

Gradually Jimmy begins to revive. The doctor, who has let fall a few drops of some mysterious stuff from a little green phial into a glass of his own particular port, says—

"Drink this—it will do you good."

"Half a minute, sir," says Jimmy, pulling himself together; with an effort he continues—"Tom, you'll drop it gently to Liza and the kids. You remember the old crib in Hercules Buildings and the number? Don't you cry, old man—it warn't your fault. After all, it's the fortune of war. Some's born to be lucky, some to be unlucky. I was allays one of the unlucky 'uns." Then to Herbert—"Sam, that's the 'party' knows all my 'biz,' sir, and can 'fake' through clown; the super-master can 'gammon' the 'party,' and Tom here'll keep the boys straight—and it'll be all rumbo, won't it, Tom? Thankee, doctor—here's jolly good luck to the pantomime, anyhow, captain."

So saying, he tossed off the contents of the glass, and five minutes later he was sleeping so soundly that he seemed oblivious both of pains and pantomimes.

If he dreamt at all, let us hope he dreamt that Liza and the bairns were happy keeping Christmas, and that this day—this one day of all days in the year, at least, they were spared the news which the morrow must bring, all too soon.

During the run of the pantomime, regularly as Saturday came, by Herbert's orders, I remitted to Jimmy's wife Jimmy's salary, nor was this all. Jack made an appeal to the public to get up a subscription for the poor clown, besides which he gave him a

benefit, and the actors, with their usual good-nature, gave their gratuitous services for a *matinée*.

Herbert, with his accustomed generosity, handed over the entire receipts (paying all expenses out of his own pocket). The benefit cleared over £200. The subscription list amounted to £196. In all we realized £400, which was devoted to setting poor Green up in business when he left the Infirmary two months later.

Alas! this misfortune was but the precursor to a crowd of troubles, which quickly trod upon each other's heels.

The Castletown pantomime was a dead failure, and involved an awful loss—I'm afraid to say how much.

"Thus bad begins, but worse remains behind." Failure followed upon failure.

The new theatre was heavily mortgaged. The mortgagees foreclosed and took possession. Tradesmen came down like locusts in every direction. A meeting of creditors was called, and they nearly broke poor Jack's heart by making him a bankrupt.

The company was disbanded; the theatres were closed; there was a general collapse; and the end was absolute ruin!

The estate yielded fifteen shillings in the pound. The payments were duly made, and Herbert received his order of discharge.

Legally he did not owe a shilling in the world, and had he followed my advice he would have remained free of all responsibility, but, unfortunately, he was induced, despite my urgent protestations, to renew the balance of certain liabilities, which he considered debts of honour, with results that shall be narrated in their proper place.

Poor Jack ! I stayed with him as long as I could be of any use.

At last one morning, when I had got to my last sovereign, he said to me—

“Look here, Bob, this will never do. ‘A ruined man is now Sir Thomas Clifford.’ You’d better go to town. Three days ago I wrote to Clerehead, telling him that you were in the market, and this is his reply.”

And he handed me a letter in which Clerehead offered me an immediate engagement at a salary beyond my most sanguine expectations. I objected most strongly to leave Jack in his trouble, but he insisted, and when he had once made up his mind nothing could induce him to change it ; so I yielded to his wishes and concluded the engagement at once. Next day, with a heavy heart, I left my poor friend for London. Could I have dreamt ! but, there—there—what avails it now ? “E’en fate itself upon the past can have no power !”

On my presenting myself at the Frivolity Clerehead gave me a cordial welcome, and bade me make myself at home without ceremony.

At first the class of pieces, and sometimes the class of people, were not exactly what I desired, but “what can’t be cured must be endured.” I did my duty to the best of my ability, and Clerehead was satisfied—but oh ! for the happy days of old !

If I could only find Her, if I could only speak to her, hear her voice, look upon her face once more !

I learnt that she was engaged for the winter at the Great International, but it was the opera season now, so of course she wasn’t playing.

The hall porter gave me her address at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. I went there; she had left three months ago. The landlady thought she had gone to "star" at some watering-place, or she might have gone abroad—she was sure she didn't know.

"Was she coming back?"

"Didn't know."

"If she came back would she drop me a line?"

The good lady's sympathies were quickened by the half-crown which I gave her little girl, and she promised to let me know if She returned.

I settled down mechanically to my duties with little devotion for them. I wrote frequently to Herbert begging him to come to town and stay with me; he replied buoyantly enough, but always declining my proffered invitation, alleging that he was preparing for the winter campaign, and that he was recuperating at the seaside.

I watched and waited for Her, but the months passed away, the summer changed into autumn, and still no sign.

CHAPTER VI.

L'ÉTOILE DE MA VIE.

“Thou art my lodestar and my queen; to thee
The current of my life sets ebblessly,
Tho' all unheeded the poor offering be.”

It is now the end of autumn. I am reconciled to, but not satisfied with, my position.

I am still anxious about Herbert—still more anxious about Her.

Van Vort and I fraternize in our bachelor way, and talk about old times.

I have an easy berth; am turning my attention a little to dramatic composition, and am vain enough to think that I can write something more intelligent than the “rot” I am compelled to listen to nightly.

I get on better with Clerehead than I anticipated, and, in his peculiar way, he begins to take a fancy to me. Decidedly he is a queer fish!

I know not when or where to have him; we are as opposite as the poles in our views upon nearly every subject, and yet there is one thing I fully appreciate in him—that is, a certain element of manliness. However heterodox may be his opinions, he has the courage of them, and doesn't care the decimal part of a ——— dump for Mrs. Grundy and her whole brood; in fact, I rather think he takes a malicious pleasure in shocking Philistine prejudices.

Tolerant as he is to every weakness or frailty of humanity, he doesn't scruple to avow his own pet aversions. Like our glorious monarch of immortal memory, he hates Boetry and Bainting, and he literally detests the Bard, the Bible, and the game of Whist! The first he stigmatizes as a twaddler and a nuisance, and he prefers to keep the other two for the solace of the future, instead of employing them for the edification or amusement of the present.

One afternoon, during our short vacation, while strolling down Bond Street, in my usual desultory way, I came across a genial and jovial Irishman, editor of a fashionable morning paper.

I had met him only once or twice before in Clerehead's sanctum.

"He was giving a dinner party that night; lots of nice people would be there. Would I come? At seven sharp!"

I accepted the invitation, only too glad to look forward to the prospect of anything that would take me a little out of myself.

At half-past six I called a hansom, and bowled down to Bryanstone Square, arriving punctually at seven. On being shown into the drawing-room not a human being was visible. An awful solemn silence reigned around. A quarter of an hour passed—another; still no sign of life.

The evening papers I had read, unfortunately, but I began to count the advertisements.

Another quarter of an hour.

Had I come to the wrong house? No; here was the card, "No. 17."

I nervously examined the photographic albums.

Had my friend made a mistake, or had I ?

Another quarter of an hour, and then, thank goodness, Mr. D—— entered with a gush of *bonhomie* and Irish hospitality. He had made a slight mistake and had found that the dinner was at eight for half-past, instead of seven.

By-and-bye people began to drop in. I was introduced here, there, and everywhere.

At length dinner was announced. I was deputed to convey downstairs a very charming lady of fair complexion, mature years, and majestic proportions. We were introduced in the usual vague and indistinct manner, so that I didn't catch my fair companion's name; but she caught mine, for she accosted me by it. She not only knew my name, but seemed to know me and all my friends of the Great Northern Circuit, and was never weary of hearing me talk about them.

The time passed all too quickly. Just before breaking up I asked my host who my fair friend was. He said—"Faith, I thought you knew that, my boy. Sure it's Mrs. Le Blanc, the celebrated novelist."

When we were exchanging our adieux, as Mrs. Le Blanc gave me her card, she said—

"Mr. Penarvon, if you are not afraid of two poor lonely women, I shall be delighted to see you at my little cottage in the Regent's Park. Name your own time, and come and dine with us *en famille*. You shall be welcome. You need not be alarmed about the other lady; she is as harmless as myself."

"Madam," I replied, "you do me too much honour. It is for you to name the time, and I shall be delighted to avail myself of your hospitality."

"Very well," said she; "suppose we say Sunday next. At seven, mind. Don't make any mistake this time."

"I am not likely," said I, "with such a pleasant prospect before me. But may I be permitted to enquire who the other lady is?"

"Certainly you may be permitted to enquire, but I may be permitted to decline telling you. No, no, my good sir, exercise your imagination until Sunday; it will be occupation for the mind. *Au revoir.*" And so we parted.

For the remainder of the week I kept thinking who could the other lady be. Could it be—? Oh, no; that was impossible.

At last, Sunday came, and punctual to the moment I presented myself at Florence Villa, where I received a hearty welcome from Mrs. Le Blanc. The bad quarter of an hour before dinner passed away pleasantly enough; still, no sign of the "other lady." Could my fair hostess have been playing a practical joke on me?

At last we heard the gong. "Mr. Penarvon, will you give me your arm?" said Mrs. Le Blanc. And down we went.

The dining-room was one of those large rooms divided in the centre by elegant but heavy portieres, which on this occasion were closed. Still no sign. I noticed, however, that the table was laid for three. I was sitting down, somewhat disappointed, for I had hoped—yes, I—

All at once I heard another loud stroke of the gong, and then a well-known voice exclaimed—"Hey, Presto! Light the Red Fire! Open, Sesame!"

The curtains flew open, and She stood before me, more beautiful than ever !

She laughed—oh ! how she laughed—she extended both her dainty hands to me, and nearly wrung mine off in the effusiveness of her welcome. “So, traitor,” she said, “what’s this I hear ? You’ve been making a conquest of Mrs. Le Blanc. Hands off!—she’s my property. Are you not, Laura dear ? But come to dinner. Have a glass of wine ? Usually we have two mutton chops and drink nothing stronger than claret and water—Gilbey’s, a shilling a bottle—but in honour of your coming, sir, we have killed the fatted calf. *Voilà !* Soup, turbot, ducks and green peas, and apple tart and a custard, which I have made myself, remembering—you great baby!—how fond of sweets you are.

“Laura has brought up from her own particular wine-bin in the cellaret a pint of the real supernaculum, and I have provided a bottle of Roederer. Oh ! the dear, dear old times ! I’m so glad to see you again, Bob.”

Yes, she actually called me Bob.

“You called me ‘Bob,’ ” said I.

“Did I ? ” she replied gravely.

“Yes. You never called me ‘Bob ’ before. It would make me so happy if you would call me ‘Bob ’ always.”

“Then I will, only I suppose I may sometimes call you ‘Robert ’ by way of variety ? ”

I thought “Robert ” sounded even nicer than “Bob,” though I was too cute to say so.

What a delightful evening it was !

She talked about everything and for everybody, but always harked back to Rosemount and the Theatre

House. She inquired about every member of the company, from the highest to the lowest, except Herbert and Miss Challoner; and once, when I mentioned his name, a flush came over her face, and she remained silent.

I didn't recur to the subject.

Mrs. Le Blanc went to the piano and sang, in a magnificent contralto, "Annie Laurie." When she had finished Clara went to her harp, on which she played divinely, and sang "The Minstrel Boy" with a spirit which "lifted" us all. And oh! what a picture she made with her superb arms and her lovely neck as she swept the strings of the harp. This was a new accomplishment. Delighted as I was with it, I was still more so when she went to the piano and recited Mrs. Browning's "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," with a heavenly accompaniment. And I found the tears trickling down my cheeks, like the great moon-calf that I was.

She sat still for a moment or two, and then sprang up and said—

"Do you know, Bob, I haven't had a dance since papa took me to the ball at Rosemount, the night of the rejoicings when the Prince was there. Granny, play us the 'Blue Danube,' there's an old darling."

She kissed Mrs. Le Blanc, and dragged her over to the piano.

"Now, Bob," she continued, "give me a waltz, sir," and in an instant we were gliding round the room, she in my arms, and I—in heaven.

Our hostess was most charming, and to-night at any rate the best listener in the world.

The brightest things must end, and my watch warned me that I must get to the York and Albany if I meant to catch the last "bus."

"Am I ever to come again?" said I.

"Ever to come again? Of course you are," replied Clara. "You are to come to dinner every Sunday until further notice; isn't he, granny?"

"Yes, my child."

"And whenever you can get a night's holiday, and a private box for a *première*, mind you are to take us poor forlorn women to the play; and, as we scorn to be under an obligation, you provide the box and we provide the cab, so that's quits. Bye, bye, Mr.—"

"Bob," said I.

"Well, Bob then."

When I got to the York and Albany it was too late for the "bus," but what did that matter? I had seen her, had held her in my arms, had inhaled her fragrant breath.

As I leaped along upon my poor game leg, I did not feel my feet touch the ground till I reached the Strand.

"A lover may bestride the gossamer
That idles in the wanton summer air,
And yet not fall, so light is vanity."

After that night, six days—six weary days—and six wakeful nights. Would Sunday never come again?

I counted the days, then I counted the hours, till it did come at last.

Six days in the week I vegetated, on the seventh I lived.

Rare old George Herbert says or sings—

"Sundays the pillars are
On which Heaven's palace archèd lies,
The other days fill up the space
And hollow rooms with vanities."

How truly these lines describe my life at this time.
The dear old man says further on—

“ On Sunday Heaven’s gate stands ope,
Blessings are plentiful and rife;
More rife than hope.”

“ Blessings were plentiful and rife ” to me, on this blessed day, for many a week to come.

Sunday succeeded Sunday, and I still found a cordial welcome at Florence Villa.

Suddenly, however, I began to note a change in Clara.

She became capricious, fractious, especially immediately previous to the commencement of the season at the Great International.

The opening piece was a horrible abortion, in which she had a detestable part to play, a loathsome adventuress, who goes on the town, or some abomination of the kind.

On one particular Sunday I found her reading a famous weekly theatrical journal. She pointed to an advertisement, and hissed through her teeth—

“ Look there ! Read ! ”

I took the paper, and saw the following announcement—

The Eminent Tragedian,
MR. JOHN HERBERT,

Assisted by

MISS CAROLINE CHALLONER,

Will commence his tour early in August at the
THEATRE ROYAL, HILLBOROUGH.

Repertoire : “ Hamlet,” “ Othello,” “ Romeo and Juliet,” “ Much Ado About Nothing,” “ Lady of Lyons,” “ Ingomar,” and “ School for Scandal.”

When I had read in silence, she exclaimed—

“ That creature plays with him all my parts—mine !

—Ophelia, Desdemona, Juliet, Beatrice, Pauline, Parthenia, and Lady Teazle—while I am condemned to this garbage. But I won't. No! I won't do it to save the theatre from perdition. There! There!" And in her anger she stamped her little feet, as she tore her part in the new piece to fragments, and threw them into the fire.

Forty-eight hours later it was all over London that she had thrown up her part and relinquished her engagement—that she would be amerced in heavy damages, &c.

Up to this moment I had dared to think—now that Herbert was irrevocably engaged to Caroline—there might be some chance for me.

Alas! I had built my hopes on sand.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

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CHAPTER I.

THE FIRE.

“ While clamour awaking roars up thro’ the street,
What a hell vapour bursting thro’ night is afloat,
And higher—and higher
Aloft soars the Column of Fire ! ”

A MONTH later and Herbert started upon his tour. As soon as he began to act my prognostications were but too fatally fulfilled.

The scoundrels who had induced him to renew his liabilities only awaited the first opportunity to open fire on him.

The tour commenced at Hillborough.

The opening play was “ The Lady of Lyons.”

At the very moment he was speaking his first line to the peasants outside, “ What—what—you won’t come in, my friends ? ” he was pounced upon, not figuratively, but literally, by a brace of bailiffs.

In this instance these limbs of the law had reckoned without their host—for a pair of vigorous back-handers sent them sprawling, while the gallant Claude bounded on the stage amidst the plaudits of the audience.

When he had settled down to the business of the scene, to his horror he found his two friends grimly mounting guard in the first entrance on each side of the stage. Presently they vanished as suddenly as

they had appeared. And when he had finished the act they had disappeared altogether.

This is how that miraculous exit was effected:— Behind the scenes was a distinguished London actress, an old friend (some said an old flame) of Herbert's, who had called to see him in passing through the town. This lady held a rapid council of war with Caroline and the lady who played Madame Deschapelles, the result being that amongst them the dear creatures contributed a diamond necklace, a massive jewelled bracelet, and a valuable ring. Then this good Samaritan called the bailiffs aside, smoothed their ruffled susceptibilities with a tip, in the shape of a sovereign, handed them the jewellery as a security, and made an appointment for them to call on Herbert at his hotel the next day.

When the limbs of the law turned up at breakfast-time he, of course, redeemed the jewellery, and returned them to his fair friends. Grateful, however, as he was for their kindness, he didn't feel his position in the affair a very dignified one.

This sort of thing could not go on for ever, and at last it came to a climax on his first night at the next town. He opened at Kingston in "Hamlet." There was a great house, and he had a tremendous "reception." The play progressed with increasing interest until the fourth scene, when Hamlet, bursting from his friends, follows the Ghost off the stage, exclaiming—"I say, away! Go on. I'll follow thee!"

For a moment a pin might have been heard to drop; then came a torrent of applause which seemed as if it would never cease.

At length, however, the scene drew off, discovering the Ghost of Hamlet's father on the ramparts of the

castle of Elsinore; but the Prince himself was conspicuous by his absence. The "buried majesty of Denmark" beckoned somewhat impatiently to his "tardy son," but he beckoned in vain, for at this juncture the act-drop descended, to the astonishment of everybody.

After some delay the manager came forward and said: "Ladies and gentlemen,—I regret to have to inform you that Mr. Herbert has been this moment arrested for debt, and it is impossible for him to continue the performance; but with your permission that great popular favourite, Mr. Rowland Fitzroy, who has already distinguished himself so highly by his rendition of the Ghost, will act the remainder of the part of 'Hamlet.'"

This proposal evoked a yell of dissent, and with one voice the audience roared out—"No, no! Herbert, or our money! Off! off!"

At this very moment there issued from behind the scenes a sound like the roar of a cannon or the explosion of an infernal machine. It was an infernal machine indeed.

In order to cast a sepulchral glimmer on the Ghost's face the management had recourse to an ingenious contrivance adapted for the year One, but nevertheless in use in this London of ours to this day in nearly every theatre at the West End.

This is a limelight apparatus consisting of certain india-rubber bags, and boards and weights, liable to be deranged or to burst at any moment.

On this occasion while his principal mounted guard over the door of Herbert's dressing-room, the bailiff's assistant, who was "three sheets in the wind," must needs go poking his nose behind the scenes to get a

peep at the play. In the semi-darkness this drunken idiot stumbled over the gas bags and upset the weights, causing an explosion which extinguished every gas-light in the building and scattered the unfortunate wretch's limbs in every direction!

Appalled by the sound of the report and the sudden and total darkness, the audience remained awe-stricken and silent till the act-drop gradually became transparent, and was illuminated by a light which flickered and floated until at length it leaped up into a sheet of flame.

At the sight a clamour of voices arose yelling out "Fire!"

At that awful sound the multitude was convulsed with terror. A rush was made for the doors, which were immediately choked up so as to render exit impossible.

Then came an unreasoning panic, which ended in a riot, in which a hundred people or more were disabled and seriously injured, or half-suffocated, while men, women, and children were actually trampled to death.

While these horrors were going on in front, behind the scenes there was a general stampede.

Herbert was preparing to undress (he had dispensed with his valet ever since the bankruptcy) at the very moment when the cry of "fire" rang through the building. At that sound the bailiff turned tail and bolted; but Herbert darted out of the room and demanded from the rabble rout of carpenters, property men, supers, fiddlers, &c., who were endeavouring to escape—

"Where does Miss Challoner dress?"

"There! There! Second flight, sir, O.P.," cried one of the men, indicating the opposite side of the

stage, which was already enveloped in a dense mass of smoke.

His own safety was certain, for the stage door, half-a-dozen paces off, was wide open.

On one side was life; on the other—possibly, perhaps, certainly—death. He did not hesitate even for an instant.

“Psha! What is life without her?” he exclaimed, as he dashed through the smoke and up the stairs, calling, “Carry! Carry! take courage, I’m coming, darling, I’m coming!”

Groping his way in the darkness he found the dressing-room door fastened. Flinging his broad shoulders against it he burst it open. Fortunately a pair of wax candles were still burning on the dressing table. By the dim light he saw Caroline on the floor half suffocated, and wholly senseless.

Rapidly tearing off his robe, and folding it carefully round her head and neck, he cast her over his shoulders, and rushed headlong down the stairs.

As he reached the first landing, the lower flight (which was of wood) crumbled into tinder and collapsed beneath his feet.

With the instinct of self-preservation he recoiled from the gulf below, and extending his hand to prevent his falling; as Providence would have it, he caught hold of a thick rope.

With the rapidity of lightning, he remembered that he had observed that very morning an ingenious contrivance for lowering scenery, consisting of a huge rope passing through iron pulleys above, and counter-weighted below, which reached from the “flies” to the stage.

Clutching the rope with his right hand, he leaped

with his precious burden into the void beyond, and fortunately alighted in safety on the stage.

Rushing forward amidst the blinding smoke, he came full butt against the wall opposite. Fortunately her head was cast over his shoulder in the opposite direction, else she must have been killed by the shock.

"Gracious God!" he exclaimed, "are we caught in a death-trap after all?"

Hark! Hark!

He hears the dull thud of the pumping of the engine.

The flames leap forth, above, below, around. Through the smoke and the murk he catches a glimpse of the open space beyond.

In a voice, which rises trumpet-tongued above the din, above the clamour, above the rattle of the engines, above the infernal roar of the flames he shouts—

"Without there! Stand clear of the door!"

The engines cease to beat. All hearts stand still.

Amidst the silence he grips his teeth like a vice, and nerves himself for a supreme effort.

Heaven give him strength!

It is done—they are out—out in the open—and there—illuminated by the glare of light from the burning ruins—dilated almost to a supernatural height—his dress torn to tatters—his hair dishevelled—his eyes aflame—there he stands, that once was Hamlet. And there at his feet lies a fair, frail creature, clad in white. Yes—there she lies—she that was Ophelia!

The silence bursts into speech—like a thunderstorm! The roar of ten thousand voices ascends in one acclaim to Heaven!

. Again! and yet again! and still again!

He sees her—he hears them, the rest is chaos!

CHAPTER II.

KISMET.

"I behold him in my dreams,
Gaunt, as it were the shadow of himself—
Death pale for lack of gentle maidens' aid."

I WAS present at the production of the new play at the Great International.

It was a terrible fiasco, and met with prompt and righteous condemnation.

As I glanced over the criticisms next morning, I caught sight in the next column of an account of the awful occurrence at Kingstown the night before.

Without a moment's delay I telegraphed (dating from Florence Villa) to Wynstone, the manager, requesting to know the worst about Caroline and Herbert—then hastily swallowing a cup of coffee, I sprang into a cab, and drove to Florence Villa.

On my way it occurred to me—

"Does she know it already? If she doesn't, what's the use of my seeing her until I have an answer to my telegram? Besides, perhaps I may have good news!"

While I was hesitating, to my astonishment out came Clara herself—radiant as Hebe.

We met face to face.

"Why what good wind has blown you here so early?" she enquired.

"I—oh—I came to tell you about the new piece at the 'International' last night."

"That's just what was taking me out. That stupid boy hasn't brought our *Morning Post* yet. He's always serving us that way. I'm going to the shop to expend a shilling in all the dailies—but you can walk with me and tell me the news as we go along."

"You may save your shilling," said I; "the piece isn't worth it. It was an 'awful frost.' 'Twas 'goosed' at the beginning, and the poor people concerned were pelted at the end."

"Then you see I was well out of it—but come in, and let us hear the 'atrocious particulars.' " And so we returned to the house.

Fortunately Mrs. Le Blanc was there to help me, or how I should have got through my task I can't imagine. I don't know to this day how I managed to get it out, or what I said.

Clara stood and listened with her eyes fixed and her face white as death, while she held her hat in her hand and crushed it to pulp as she muttered—

"And it was for *her*—for *her*."

At this moment a double knock was heard. I rushed to the door, and brought in the telegram, which I rapidly tore open. At a glance she comprehended the situation.

"Not dead! Say that!" she cried.

"No," I said, "not dead."

"Thank God!" she exclaimed.

She staggered back, and appeared about to fall. I moved towards her, but she drew herself up quickly, and said—

"It's nothing, thank you; I'm quite well. Let me see the telegram."

She took it; scanned it in a strange manner, and returned it, abruptly saying—

"I can't make it out. Read it, please."

I read aloud—

"Miss Challoner suffering from severe shock, otherwise unhurt. Herbert dangerously, but not fatally, injured. At present, quite unconscious. Doctor gives hopes of recovery."

She muttered between her closed teeth, as if quite unconscious of our presence—

"She is unhurt, of course—of course; while he—"

Mrs. Le Blanc whispered me—

"Go, Robert; leave her to me. Come to-night; she will be better then."

Without another word I took my leave. My own suffering taught me to sympathise with hers.

My first idea was to go to Jack at once.

As soon as I saw Clerehead, I asked leave of absence for a few days, but was met with a prompt and decided refusal.

To be just to him, I could not be spared a day, scarcely an hour, from the theatre.

The fact was, I had tried my hand at authorship, and my maiden effort, "Orpheus in Hades," was now in active preparation.

Neither trouble nor expense had been spared upon it. Rehearsals were going on incessantly. I had to look after scene painters, carpenters, property men, costumiers, and my absence would be fatal to the success of the production.

My finances were in anything but a flourishing con-

dition, so I borrowed ten pounds from Van Vort—who was awfully cut up about Herbert—and forwarded it, with ten pounds of my own, to Wynston, desiring him to see that Jack and Caroline wanted for nothing, and begging him to let me know how they were getting on. My letter was directed to Kingstown Theatre, but as I subsequently learnt, it miscarried through the destruction of the theatre, and a month later it was returned to me through the Dead-Letter Office.

To make matters worse, Clerehead had engaged some star of the Music Halls for Orpheus. The new importation proved to be a rank “duffer,” and we did not know where to turn for an eligible substitute. Really, what with one trouble and another, I was not in a very enviable state of mind.

What idiocy prompted me to tell Clerehead that Clara was ill, and to give him her address, I don’t know, but I did tell him, nevertheless, and, while I was occupied with the rehearsals, he called at Florence Villa daily, made all kinds of polite inquiries, left baskets of fruits and heaps of flowers, and by the end of the week had quite established himself upon terms of friendly intimacy.

I managed to get half an hour every night to run up and see how she was getting on, but found her very much altered; when she was not moody, she was hysterical, indeed, at times she was half demented.

On Saturday there was a change for the better, and she appeared quite calm and collected. When I was making my adieux she said, “Mind you come to dinner to-morrow; we’ve asked Mr. Clerehead to join us, so be sure to bring him with you. Ta-ta!”

On Sunday Clerehead called at my chambers and drove me to Florence Villa.

When we arrived, Clara was so occupied in studying a Bradshaw that for a moment she was oblivious of our presence. When at last she saw us, she appeared embarrassed, and thrust the book aside. Immediately recollecting herself, she shook hands with me in silence, and welcomed Clerehead with effusion, thanking him for his fruit and flowers.

She had never been more demonstratively agreeable than on this occasion. She sang her choicest songs to her own accompaniment on the harp, she rattled off Edgar Allan Poe's "Bells," and she gave forth these verbal fireworks with a perfect coruscation of chords and arpeggios.

Clerehead was as much impressed with her beauty as her ability. No wonder, for she was very affable and communicative to him; but whenever I made the slightest effort to get into confidential conversation with her she avoided me.

At last came the time for our departure. Clerehead said all kinds of pleasant things, and bowed himself out.

I longed to get in a last word alone, so when I saw Mrs. Le Blanc wishing him good-night, I whispered—

"Miss Trevor."

"Well, Mr. Penarvon?"

"You've never called me 'Bob' once to-night."

"Haven't I, Robert?"

"Ah! that's nice. I hope you'll continue to get strong."

"Oh! I'm strong enough now. But what says the Prince of Denmark?—'Thou would'st not think how ill all's here about my heart.'"

"Nay—"

"'Tis but foolery, but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman,' and I'm only a woman after all."

"A woman! You are an angel!"

"A fallen one, I'm afraid. Good-bye, Bob."

"No, not 'good-bye'—'good-night.'"

"Now then, Penarvon," Clerehead sang out, "are you going to be all night making your adieux? The horse is getting chilled. That's right. Ladies, I kiss your hands. Off we go."

Puffing away at his cigar in a brown study, he said after a time—

"That's a monstrous fine woman, Penarvon."

"Who? Mrs. Le Blanc?"

"Mrs. Le Blanc be—Blanked. You know who I mean, you old humbug! I never saw such eyes, such hair, such arms, and such a neck in my life! What a splendid piece of furniture for a man's fireside! Are you very much 'gone' on her?"

"I—I—"

"Is she very much 'gone' on you?"

"I don't know. I think—I think—"

"Oh! you 'think,' do you? Well, if it has gone no further than that, you're a muff! Robert Penarvon, do you know to have a woman like that call me husband I'd give up the Frivolity, the Megatherium, the Electric Spark, and all the Lottys and Tottys that ever lived."

"Would you really?"

"Yes, really; and what's more, if it wasn't for—"

"Well, if it wasn't for what?"

"Never you mind, that's my business. There's a

skeleton in every closet, but I keep mine locked in the cupboard ! Have a weed ? ”

“ No, thanks.”

A dead silence ensued till he dropped me at my chambers, then he said—

“ Look here, old man, I was cranky just now. Shake hands ; you’re a lucky fellow, if you’ve only pluck. Strike while the iron’s hot. You’re nearer the goal than you think ; don’t waste a moment. Remember—

‘ He that will not when he may,
When he will he shall have nay.’

Think of that ! ”

I did think of it all night, and never closed my eyes.

I thought of it all next day.

During the entire rehearsal every note the band played seemed to shape itself into—

“ He that will not when he may,
When he will he shall have nay.”

That night I rattled up to Florence Villa in a hansom, determined to brave my fate and know the worst.

As I reached the door my cab almost came in contact with another, which drove up from an opposite direction. As I sprang out of the one, Mrs. Le Blanc alighted from the other.

She had gone down to Lavender Sweep to pass the day with some friends, and had only that moment returned.

We had barely time to exchange the usual salutations, when the servant opened the door.

“How is Miss Trevor?” I enquired.

“She is gone, sir!” the girl replied.

“Gone!” I exclaimed.

“Gone?” echoed Mrs. Le Blanc.

“Yes, m'm; she left half an hour after you went this morning, and she bade me give you this.”

Mrs. Le Blanc read the note, and gave it to me without a word.

It ran thus—

“You shall hear from me by-and-by. Tell poor Bob I'm sorry for him, but I can't help it. It is ‘Kismet!’”

CHAPTER III.

THE LILY AND THE ROSE.

“All days are night to me till thee I see,
And nights bright days, when dreams do show me thee.”

BESIDES being nearly suffocated Caroline had sustained a severe shock, but beyond that, thanks to Herbert's precautions, she was unhurt.

He, himself, had suffered severely; his arms, hands, and chest were dreadfully scorched, his hair was all destroyed; his face and neck, however, had fortunately escaped, owing, so the doctor said, to its having been coated with a German pigment, which he had used for his “make-up” in Hamlet.

For many days he lay between life and death.

His misfortunes and his helpless condition one would have thought might have entitled him to sympathy and commiseration—

“From brassy bosoms, and rough hearts of flint;”

but, alas! he had to deal with a bill-discounter!

The High Bailiff of Kingstown communicated with this scoundrel after the fire, requesting further instructions.

He got them in one brief line—

“Take the money, or take him.”

As Herbert was utterly unconscious it was useless to trouble him. It was generally known, however, that Caroline was engaged to him; so, as soon as the bailiff ascertained that she was visible, in fact, the Monday after the fire, the very day the poor girl got up from her sick bed, he called upon her at her lodgings, and explained his position with as much delicacy as he could. He alleged that his instructions were imperative. He must have Herbert or the money. Touched by her grief and prostration, and heartily sympathizing both with her and Herbert, the poor fellow burst out—

“Those blooming bill-discounting thieves have got no bowels, saving your presence, miss. But what’s a fellow to do who’s got a wife and seven kids to keep out of this beastly business? I shall have to take Mr. Herbert when he gets better, or part with the coin myself; and s’help me never, I’d rather do that, if I could afford it, than see a beautiful young filly and a real lady like you turning on the waterworks like that! Don’t you cry, my pretty—I beg pardon, lady—but look here! It’s only a hundred quid, costs and all. If you can squeeze half on it, I’ll manage the other half myself, and trust to Mr. Herbert’s honour to make it square when he gets on his pins again!”

“Alas! if my life depended on it,” she replied, “I have barely got half fifty pounds, and I must keep that for his sake.”

“What! no bits of jewellery, nor no little nick-nacks?”

“The whole of my stage wardrobe was destroyed in the fire,” she replied. “Except the contents of one small portmanteau I have nothing in the world. As

for my jewellery, this is all I have left," and she showed him her engagement ring, her locket, and a small Geneva watch, which had been her mother's.

"It's a bad job, miss," said the bailiff, "and I'm very sorry, but they sha'n't touch him till he's all right, jigger me if they shall. P'raps some'at 'll turn up 'twixt this and then!" And the poor fellow bowed himself out.

For an hour or more she sat alone and ruminated.

When the doctor came she asked for his bill and paid it, then requested him to show her to Herbert's hotel.

He was still quite unconscious, but was still continually muttering her name in his delirium.

"You can leave us," said the doctor to the nurse.

"Will—will it prove fatal, doctor?" inquired Caroline.

"No," he replied, "thank goodness! No fear of that. Mr. Herbert has led a temperate life, and has a constitution of iron. If it were not for that he would have been a dead man before this."

"How long will it be before he gets well, do you think?"

"Almost three months."

"Thank you. I should like to sit by him an hour or two."

"Glad to leave him in such safe hands. I know you will take care of him."

"Trust me for that!" she replied, and the doctor left the room.

"Poor Jack! Poor old darling!" she exclaimed. "And it was all for me—for me! But the doctor said 'three months.' Good Heavens! how are we to exist for three months?"

At this moment the door was violently flung open, and a huge vulgar woman, a perfect mountain of flesh, came in and planted herself in a chair with a "squash" that shook the room.

"So," said she, without ceremony, "you're yon chap's missus," indicating Herbert.

"I don't understand you, madam," replied Caroline.

"Don't madam me, you stuck-up thing. I know the ways of you play-acting folk. It's no use your givin' yourself fine lady airs with me. What I want to know is this. Who's a-goin' to pay me my money? That's about the size of it."

"Give yourself no apprehension—"

"I don't want no apprehension. I want my brass, and I mean to have it. There's welly twenty pounds a-comin' to me, and if I don't get it, out he goes like a shot into t' street, or t' wurkus—there's no two ways about that."

"Make out your bill at once—at once, do you hear, woman?" said Caroline, pointing to the door.

This display of spirit frightened the creature a little, so she got up and said—

"I didn't want to be uncivil, miss. I only wants my rights."

"And I only want your bill," replied Caroline.

With a vicious glare the virago quitted the room.

"Heavens! what's to become of him?" exclaimed Caroline. "Oh! my darling, I think I could sell myself body and soul for you—but to stay here and see you starve! No! I mustn't do that!"

At her chatelaine she carried a small black velvet bag, mounted with silver. Emptying its contents on the dressing-table, she began to eagerly count the

money which lay before her. It amounted to eighteen pounds and some odd pence. By this time the landlady returned, and with a grunt flung the bill on the table. It came to seventeen pounds and some odd shillings.

"Perhaps you'll be kind enough to receipt it?" said Caroline.

"Where's t' brass?"

"Here."

"Hand it over, then."

"When you have prepared the receipt."

"You're mighty particular."

"In dealing with a person like you it is necessary to be particular."

"Like me, indeed! There's t' receipt."

"And there is the money."

Without another word the harpy swept the coin into her apron and waddled out of the room, banging the door after her.

With the addition of some loose silver in her purse, Caroline found she had about fifteen shillings left.

"Let me see," she said, "three pounds at my lodgings; a pound for the nurse, a pound for my fare to London, a pound for cabs and other trifles."

She sat ruminating for a while, then took off her watch and chain, looked at them, and said with a sad smile—

"We never thought it would come to this, mamma. Did we? Ah! well, never mind; if there were nothing worse to fear than this."

Hastily slipping on her coat and hat, she passed forth into the street.

After some time she found what she sought; but as

she had never been in such a place before, she hesitated for a moment or two before she entered the shop.

A thin, elderly man was on the other side of the counter, on which she placed her watch and chain in silence. The man looked at her; he had been in the theatre on the night of the fire, and was one of the few who had escaped wholly unhurt. After examining the watch and chain, he inquired—

“How much?”

“Ten pounds, if you please.”

“Too much; I can buy ’em new by the gross, watch and chain together, for six pounds ten apiece.”

“But I want it so badly—and—and—I’ve lost my purse.”

“Looks like it, miss,” he said, grimly handing her the purse, which she had inadvertently placed upon the counter. “Five is the outside I can make it. Is it to be five?”

“I suppose it must.”

“What name, miss?”

“What name? Why, Car—No—no—Mary Wale.”

“Oh! indeed. Do you happen to have such a thing as tuppence about you, Miss Wale? Because if you’ll give me tuppence for the ticket, I’ll give you five sovereigns, Miss Wale.”

With charming consistency, poor Caroline opened her purse, from which she extracted twopence, which she gave the pawnbroker, who then handed over the five sovereigns.

When she left the shop the old fellow muttered—

“‘Mary Wale,’ so I should say. ‘Very like a whale!’ Poor, dear young lady! Miss Caroline Challoner, or I’m a Dutchman!”

When she returned to the hotel she rang the bell and asked for the Boots. He came up, and a civil, shrewd Yorkshire lad he was.

"What time does the next train start for London?" she inquired.

"Seven o'clock, my lady."

"It's now four. I've three hours to spare. Can you show me where Dr. Hall lives?"

"There's a lot o' Halls, my lady. There's Tom Hall and Dick Hall, there's 'Firmary Hall and 'Spensary Hall, there's Talky Hall and Cheeky Hall, there's Clever Hall and Dirty Hall, and he's the cleverest of the lot. Which on 'em might you be wantin', miss?"

"I want the gentleman who has attended Mr. Herbert."

"Oh! yes, I know him; that's Clever Hall."

"Come with me, then, show me where he lives, and I'll pay you for your trouble."

Boots conducted her to the doctor's house. He had been called away to Retford in a case of life and death, Would not be back till next day.

Would the lady leave any message?

No; "the lady" would write when she got to town.

Then "the lady" went to her lodgings, paid the bill, arranged for honest Boots to take her portmanteau to the station, and meet her there at a quarter to seven.

These preparations completed, she returned to the hotel, and desired the nurse to wait in the next room.

She then went to Herbert's bedside, and sat there, sometimes bathing his forehead, sometimes giving him to drink, sometimes smoothing his pillow.

Although perpetually murmuring her name, he still remained unconscious of all her loving care.

At last it grew dark, and the clock struck six, half-past, a quarter to seven. Then she sprang up and said—

“It is time.”

Stooping over him, she kissed his brow and said—

“My darling, it is for your sake. Heaven bless and protect you, and send me safely back to you.”

Then she called the nurse, gave her a sovereign, and bade her be careful of her patient.

Pausing a moment at the bar, to explain to the ogress that she would return in a few days, she urged upon her to let Herbert have every care and attention, promising to be responsible for all expense.

Then she passed forth rapidly through the covered arcade which communicated with the railway station, where she took a third-class ticket for London.

As she moved over to the “up” train, where Boots awaited her with the portmanteau, a lady, clad in sables and closely veiled, sprang out of a first-class carriage from the down train, which had that moment arrived. She fixed her eyes on Caroline till she took her seat, and the train disappeared through the tunnel on its way to town. Then she tore off her veil. It was Clara!

Before she left London she had approached the border land of insanity, as near as it was possible, without passing the boundary. Since the news of the fire she had thought incessantly of Herbert’s helpless condition. She knew that he was a ruined man—poor—perchance penniless. She pictured him helpless—destitute. She knew that Caroline had nothing but

her small salary to depend on, and must be in an impecunious condition also, and therefore powerless to aid him.

Au contraire, besides her annual income, she (Clara) had been for nearly twelve months in receipt of a handsome salary, and a handsome balance still stood to her account at the bank.

The absurd and sensational paragraphs which appeared daily in the papers about Herbert added to her continually increasing anxiety.

She could not rest by day or sleep by night—perpetual brooding upset the balance of her mind—until, at last, she determined, at all hazards, to know the worst.

Having drawn five hundred pounds out of the bank, she started for Kingstown with the fixed idea to see him, to nurse him, to comfort him, to save his life. How to accomplish this object she didn't quite know. As she came along in the train she thought of a thousand schemes. Perhaps her rival was ill; if so, she should have all that money could procure. Then she thought—

“Suppose she is better, I will go to her, and implore her on my bended knees to let me share with her the task of nursing and tending him. When he is safe, I will leave him to her. If she will let me participate in this labour of love, I will be her servant, her slave; if she refuse, woe—woe to both!”

Even now that she had arrived at her journey's end, she had no definite plan of action. She stood on the platform—her luggage at her feet, her eyes fixed on the departing train—until she was awakened from her reverie by Boots, who said—

"Railway Hotel, my lady?"

"Yes," she replied.

Although her brain was in a whirl, her observant eye had noted that the man had been in attendance on Caroline; so, as she followed him to the hotel, she inquired—

"The lady you just now saw off is going to London, I suppose?"

"Yes, my lady," Boots replied, looking somewhat astonished.

"Mr. Herbert is still at the hotel?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Any better?"

"Not much, my lady."

"Anyone attending him?"

"Nurse and Doctor Hall, my lady."

By the time they were at the hotel her mind was made up.

Without preface she perpetrated a pious fraud; boldly told the landlady that Herbert was her brother, that she had come to nurse and take charge of him, that money was no object, and that she would be responsible for everything.

The ghoul muttered to herself—

"Pretty sister, indeed! Another of his fine madams, I expect. Never mind, she's got a seal-skin coat worth fifty guineas, a gold watch and chain, and a hundred pounds worth of diamonds on her fingers; besides, she's lots of luggage—that's good enough for me."

Then she answered aloud—

"Certainly, my lady; I'm glad you've come to look after him. That there Miss Challenger have never been to see him but once."

This was a random shot ; but it reached its mark.

"Indeed !" interjected Clara, eagerly.

"Yes, indeed, m'm, though he was anigh his death on her account ; and now the stuck-up thing have gone to London and left him all alone, poor young gentleman ; not but what I've done all I could for him, and looked after him night and day as if he'd abin my own son. Not that I ever had a son ; but, for all that, I've bin a mother to him, that's what I have ! "

And so, puffing and blowing like a grampus, the horrible creature led the way upstairs, and conducted the new-comer to Herbert's room, where she left her.

At last ! at last ! she was alone with him.

She stood for a moment, silent and motionless, contemplating the sad picture, then, trembling with "the pity of it," subdued by his very helplessness, and convulsed by the tumultuous emotions which stirred every pulse of her being, her great pride subdued by her still greater love, her proud heart thawed, all the woman in her nature leaped forth beyond control, and she melted into a transport of tears as she gazed upon the poor faded wreck of the man she loved.

She had accepted the "ghoul's" statement as gospel ; for alas ! it is only too easy to believe that which we wish to believe ; and she readily accredited the statement that Caroline had abandoned him—nay, more, I fear, she was almost impiously grateful to Heaven that this calamity had befallen him, since it had brought him nearer, given him to her at last.

Her excitement having somewhat abated, she called the nurse. When the woman came she gave her directions to be at hand during the night. For herself, she arranged to sleep on the sofa in the adjacent room, that

she might be always ready to attend upon him at a moment's notice. She bathed his fevered brow again and again, gave him to drink, and then cast herself on the couch, overcome with fatigue and excitement, and—happiness!

What cared she that he was poor, and seared, and blighted? She would tend him by day; she would watch over his pillow by night; she would, with Heaven's help, bring him back to health and strength. And then, when he knew that "that other one," for whose sake he had imperilled his life, had basely abandoned him in his adversity—but that *she* had remained true—her faithful, constant love would be at last rewarded.

CHAPTER IV.

ORPHEUS IN HADES.

"Orpheus, with his lute made trees
And the mountain tops that freeze
Bow themselves when he did sing."

EARLY on Tuesday morning I hurried out, feverish and unrefreshed, to consult Clerehead as to who was to play Orpheus.

"Well, Bob," said he, "you don't look lively this morning. What's up?"

"Don't ask me," I replied. "She's gone."

"The deuce she has! Where to?"

I could not take him into my confidence, so I remained silent.

"Ah, well, well, I told you—you know I told you—

'He that will not when he may,
When he will he shall have nay.'

"Mr. Clerehead, if you please," said I, "leave me to bear my troubles as well as I can, and come to business.

"Who is to play Orpheus?"

"If this horrible creature whom you have engaged goes on for the part, we shall never get to the end of the piece; it will be damned in the second scene."

"Oh, yes, I knew all about that, my dear fellow;

but I can't make an Orpheus. I have been to the shops where they are manufactured, and they haven't got the article in stock."

"Well," I replied, "you'd better postpone the production until we can look round and see who's to be had."

At this moment the messenger came in with a letter.

"Special for you, Mr. Penarvon; brought by a Commissionaire from Morley's Hotel."

"Anyone waiting?"

"No, sir."

"That'll do, you can go."

The letter was to this effect—

"Morley's Hotel,

"Monday night.

"DEAR MR. PENARVON,—

"I am here seeking an engagement. Is there any likelihood of an opening at your theatre? If there is, as I have not the honour of being acquainted with Mr. Clerehead, will you broach the subject to him, and oblige,

"Dear Mr. Penarvon,

"Faithfully yours,

"CAROLINE CHALLONER."

I gave Clerehead the note, and lapsed into a brown study while he read it.

What could it mean? The one here, the other there! How could it be?

I was roused from my reverie by Clerehead calling out—

"Wake up, old man—wake up. Challoner! Chal-

loner! Is that the girl that Jack Herbert saved from being roasted alive at Kingstown the other day?"

"Yes," I replied, "fortunately for us; for in saving her he has also saved our piece. If she will condescend to do it (which I rather doubt), here is the Orpheus, beyond compare."

"The deuce she is! I always thought she was a Shakesperian maniac—a regular Tragedy Jack in petticoats. Do you really mean to say she can play the part?"

"I mean to say that she can play anything. She sings like Patti, dances like Henriette D'Or; and in a boy's part she is a veritable Apollo. Then she is the most beautiful creature on earth—save one."

"Aye, aye; that goes without saying. There never was one like that one, and never will be another. Nature broke the mould in making Her."

This he said with more earnestness than was usual to him.

"Take my advice," said I, "don't stand upon your dignity; lose not a moment. If you can induce Miss Challoner to accept the part, don't higggle about terms; chain and secure her at once. If you don't Braybrooke will nail her the next minute."

"Enough said. I'm off like a shot."

"One moment," said I. "I'd go with you, but I should keep the rehearsal standing still, and they are all waiting for me now, on the stage. You'd better take my card, for she's as proud as Lucifer and as punctilious as the Queens of Spain used to be. Don't try your free and easy airs with her, or——"

"'Pon my soul, Mr. Penarvon, you do take the strangest liberties——"

"Yes, I know I do; but, for all that, if you want to engage Miss Challoner, take my advice."

"All right—confound you—all right, old wiseacre. Here, Benson, call me a hansom."

And away went Clerehead to Trafalgar Square, and away went I to my rehearsal.

On arriving at the hotel, Clerehead was shown into Caroline's room.

They were both punctiliously ceremonious to each other.

He approached her with deference, and she received him with lofty courtesy. He opened the ball by presenting my card, and stating that I had desired him to call. She responded by saying that, finding in the present state of public taste there was no possibility of obtaining an opening in the higher department of the drama to which she naturally aspired, she was not indisposed to accept the principal character in burlesque or opera bouffe.

He replied that most fortunately an opportunity presented itself in the forthcoming production of "*Orpheus in Hades*," the *title rôle* of which was vacant.

"Would he let her see the libretto and the music?"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

And promising to send both in an hour's time by the musical conductor, he took his leave, profoundly impressed with her distinction and self-possession, and more especially with her beauty.

Within the hour came the conductor, no less a person than our old friend Van Vort. The little man brought his violin as well as the score. She sat down to the piano, and they ran through the music together, she singing and playing at sight.

Presently she said—

“Will you allow me?” and taking the violin from his hand, she played one of the most difficult passages with marvellous skill and dexterity. Dear old Van listened enraptured, and gaped open-mouthed as she returned him the violin.

When he got back to the theatre he burst out—

“Ach, Mein Gott! Mynherr Clerehead, you have found a black tulip, a rose diamond, a tenth muse! She has a voice with two registers. You should hear her lower notes. Then she play on the fiddle like Joachim or Neruda.”

“What did I tell you?” said I.

Next day, at noon, Clerehead again presented himself at Morley’s. After the usual civilities, he said—

“Have you thought the matter over?”

“Yes,” replied Caroline, “I will accept the part provided I may introduce two musical pieces of my own. They will give no trouble, for I shall accompany myself.”

“Whatever you like, Miss Challoner. And how about terms?”

“Oh, that question can stand over until after the production of the piece.”

“Certainly, certainly; but we must see about your dress; we are having everything direct from Paris.”

“Thanks; but I always design my own costumes. If you will kindly send me Moyr Smith’s book on Grecian Costume, and let me see the sketches, so that I may not clash with the colours of the other characters, that will be all I require.”

Her coolness both piqued and posed him.

He rose to make his adieux, then a happy thought struck him.

As he got to the door he paused, and played a strong card.

"Pardon me," said he; "but of course I've heard of the fire at Kingstown, and I hope you will not feel offended. Will you permit me to be your banker?"

"You are very good, sir; but should I fail?"

"It isn't possible; I won't believe it. You will permit me——"

"I fear I shall frighten you."

"I'm not easily frightened."

"I want a hundred and twenty pounds. A hundred pounds to send away, and twenty pounds for my dresses."

"Are you sure that will be enough?"

"Quite sure."

"In half an hour's time you shall have a draft, payable at sight, for a hundred pounds, and £20 in notes. Anything else?"

"No, thanks. Good-morning."

"Good-morning—good-morning."

And Clerehead went away, beaming, at having scored one, at least, in the game.

In less than half an hour, the draft, the notes, and the sketches were delivered to her. An hour later she was hard at work upon the designs for her dresses; while the draft was on its way to the nearest post-office, in a registered letter, addressed—

"JOHN HERBERT, Esq.,
"Railway Hotel,
"Kingstown."

By the same post she wrote to Doctor Hall, enclosing one of her five-pound notes in payment of the nurse, and requesting to be kept *au courant* with Herbert's progress.

When we met at the first rehearsal, her eyes lighted up with pleasure.

"Oh! Mr. Penarvon," she said, "it is delightful to meet someone I know amongst all these strange people; above all, to meet you, who love Him so well!"

"How did you leave him?" I inquired.

"Very weak and feeble, and still unconscious, but surely, though slowly, recovering. He's in safe hands, that's one comfort."

Had I told her in whose hands he was by that time, I fear "Orpheus" would never have been produced.

I gave her a chair beside me at the prompt table, ensconced her there at every rehearsal, despite the artillery of angry looks directed at her and me from scores of bright eyes, the owners of which couldn't understand such a post of honour being accorded to a "provincial" (with a big P) actress.

After all, hard words and black looks harm no one; and she went about so quietly, so affably, and with such a total absence of assumption, that the angry fair ones soon condoned the invidious distinction.

At length, after a fortnight's continuous rehearsal, the piece was ready; and the eventful night came which was to decide her fate as an actress, mine as an author.

The theatre was crowded with a representative audience; indeed, all the most distinguished people in town were present.

The curtain rose upon the Elysian Fields, a scene of

great brightness and splendour, more tawdry than I could have wished; but Clerehead knew his public, and insisted on having his own way in this particular. Nearly all the gods and goddesses of the mythology were discovered, gorgeously arrayed in cloth of gold and silver, or exquisite cashmeres, rich in jewels and bastard Greek ornaments—as much like the real thing as chalk is to cheese.

There were flaxen-haired beauties, golden-haired beauties, and red-haired beauties (dark hair at this period was not fashionable). There were so-called beauties, who were not beautiful at all; there were photographic beauties, whose pictures were to be seen in every shop window; there were some finely-proportioned women, but there were some skinny, scraggy, creatures, immature green goslings, mere abortions of nature, loathsome to behold! There were beauties in high dresses and low dresses. There were beauties very much over-dressed, and beauties very much under-dressed; in fact, there were some who appeared to have dispensed with that ceremony altogether.

The scene, despite my protestations, ended with a cellar-flap breakdown, which was received with an ominous silence that boded little good for the success of the piece.

Hey! Presto! the prompter's whistle; and lo! a cool and sylvan landscape in Arcadia.

Then an empty stage, a dead silence—something approaching what the actors call a “stick.”

Clerehead and I sat together in the stage-box, on the left-hand side.

In the prompt entrance opposite stood Caroline, enveloped from head to foot in a voluminous cloak of

black corded silk, lined with ermine, from which peeped forth one tiny, sandalled foot.

Impatiently turning to me, Clerehead exclaimed—

“Surely she isn’t going to funk it! What does she mean? Where is her dress? And why the deuce doesn’t she come on?”

“Wait, and you’ll see,” I replied.

He hadn’t to wait long, for even as I spoke the cloak dropped into the arms of the dresser, and, striking his lute, Orpheus bounded on the stage!

The contrast between those half-dressed, brazen hussies, with their leary looks, their frowsy mops of tow, and this young Greek with his straight eyebrows and long curved lashes, from which the great glorious eyes of Irish grey gleamed forth luminous with opalescent light, and the small, square classic head with its affluence of raven hair simply pushed behind the shell-shaped ears as it waved down below to the waist, was as astounding as it was grateful to the sight.

His—or her—costume was pure Greek; in fact, the only Greek dress worn in the play. The under-garment of pale sea green, trimmed with a simple Grecian scroll of gold, surmounted by a robe of delicate lavender, embossed with silver, and draped with consummate skill, left the lovely arms quite bare to the shoulder, discovering beneath the hem of the skirt lower limbs of most exquisite symmetry. Upon her dainty feet were classic sandals of buff and silver, thonged between the toes. Her fleshings of Italian silk were thin almost to transparency, so that every articulation of the perfect limbs stood revealed in glowing life, and when she moved it was indeed the very “poetry of motion.”

Her face was quite pale, without a trace of pigment

or preparation, but the hot blood rose to her brow or flushed upon her cheek in prompt response to the emotion of the moment. The graceful curves and exquisitely rounded outlines of the noble figure were clearly indicated beneath the simple garb, which left "every beauty free to sink or swell as nature pleases."

Her appearance evoked at first simply a sensation of astonishment. Certainly it was the only instance I can recall in my experience (except upon one memorable occasion which does not concern the present narrative !) when a London audience has ever permitted a stranger to appear without a welcome. She was received in solemn silence. If the coldness disconcerted her she made no sign. I think it rather nerved her with a contemptuous disdain.

A few lines served to introduce a charming yet simple aria, which she sang to her own accompaniment upon the lute.

When she finished there was a dead silence. My heart was in my mouth. Her fate and mine trembled in the balance. Another moment of suspense, then one man in the pit exclaimed—

"By —! It's not an earthly voice! It's heavenly music!"

The spell was broken. Then up arose a shout which shook the building from base to dome!

From that moment she held the audience in her hand. But it was not until the last scene that the climax was reached.

She entered playing the melody which has softened the heart of the grim King of Hades, and has released Eurydice from the Shades.

The experiment was a bold and perilous one. She

sang and played upon the violin, and danced at the same moment. The music was her own; the lines were Dryden's. I can hear her wonderful voice now as she intoned the words—

“Eurydice—the woods—
Eurydice—the floods—
Eurydice—the rocks resound.”

The instrument responded to the voice; her whole frame dilated, as it swayed in rhythmical undulations to the music, which burst forth into a wild *ravissement* of joy, as the chords snapped asunder, and Eurydice lay sobbing on her lover's breast.

Then occurred a strange and altogether unprecedented scene. Frivolous women and fashionable men were alike convulsed with strong emotion, and were not ashamed of it. Amidst their sobs and tears arose a cry—

“Enough! Enough! No more. Drop the curtain!”

The prompter didn't know what it meant, but I did, and I rushed round and “rang down” immediately.

Then came the crowning triumph.

The orchestra, led by Van Vort, cast discipline and decorum to the winds. They banged their bows upon their fiddle backs until I thought they would have smashed every violin in the orchestra. They stood up and cheered like men possessed.

The enthusiasm was contagious and irresistible, and communicated itself to the entire audience. Men sprang upon the seats and waved their hats; women stood up and waved their handkerchiefs, and when I led her forth, for I, too, shared an infinitesimal shadow of her glory, they pelted her with flowers.

One royal lady not only cast her bouquet, but her fan,

rare, unique, and of inestimable value, at the dainty feet of Orpheus.

Amidst all this triumphal furor, her heart was far away in the sick-room at Kingstown, and when I led her off the stage she moved as if in a dream.

At this moment Clerehead came round. Wild with excitement he rushed over and whispered to me—

“By Jove! I never saw anything like it. They are all going mad; and I think I am going mad myself.” Then turning to Caroline he said—“The P—and the P—ss wish to congratulate you, Miss Challoner. They are waiting in the ante-room.”

“One instant, sir,” she said.

And stepping into her dressing-room she emerged in a moment, enveloped in her cloak, as before, from head to heel, and thus attired she was conducted to the Royal presence.

The interview was short, but all kinds of gracious things were said; a few gracious words were vouchsafed to the author, then Clerehead attended his illustrious guests to their carriage, while Caroline returned to her room.

When I escorted her to her cab, she shrunk from the mob at the stage door, and, clinging to me, said—

“Please don’t leave me, Mr. Penarvon, until I get home.”

We drove away amidst the cheers of the crowd.

When I left her at the hotel I said—

“May I, too, congratulate you? You have saved my poor piece, and ‘made for yourself a great reputation.’”

"You are very good to say so," she replied.

As she bade me "good-night" I heard her murmur—

"Ah! if He were only here."

"Ah! if She were only here," said I, as I turned into the Strand.

There were no two sadder souls in London that night than the successful actress and the successful author.

CHAPTER V.

"A BOOTLESS JOURNEY."

" 'Tis in vain
To seek him here, that means not to be found."

DURING the time devoted to the rehearsals of Orpheus I remained in total ignorance of what was going on at Kingstown, and, indeed, it was not until long after I learnt the occurrences here related.

The day after her arrival Clara consulted the physician as to the prospects of Herbert's recovery and the treatment to be adopted.

Dr. Hall's theory remained unaltered; he maintained that time, and rest, and absence from anxiety were all that was essential to effect a radical cure. He was certain that consciousness would supervene in a few days.

To be sure, there was one serious drawback to the patient's immediate recovery, and that was the vicinity of the hotel to the railway station. Trains were coming and going every half hour, and every train that came or went, shook the house to its foundation, while the infernal screech of the engines might almost have awakened the dead.

Even in Herbert's present comatose and unconscious condition, an instinctive shudder of pain and horror,

passed through him every time a train entered or left the station.

The doctor, therefore, advised that he should be removed as soon as he was able to bear the journey, and Clara made her arrangements accordingly. She therefore wired Mrs. Le Blanc requesting her to come to Kingstown immediately.

When I called at Florence Villa the following Sunday I found the house closed, and I could obtain no information as to what had become of Mrs. Le Blanc, though I shrewdly suspected her destination.

When Caroline's registered letter arrived at Kingstown, Herbert was still totally unconscious and unable to sign for it, and the postman positively refused to deliver it without his signature. Nor was this all; the letter she sent to the doctor miscarried!

Not knowing his exact address she had directed it simply, "— Hall, Esq., M.D., Kingstown."

Now, it will be remembered that "Boots" at the hotel told her that there were many "Halls" in Kingstown.

Unfortunately, the letter was delivered to the wrong "Hall," who returned it to the postal authorities, who tried another "Hall," who also was not the right "Hall," and the result was that both the registered letter for Herbert and the one for the doctor were sent back to the Dead Letter Office. In the ordinary course of events both communications would have been returned to Caroline in a week or ten days, but, unfortunately, in her haste to catch the post—and let it be added in her delight at being able to send the money—she had omitted to write her address, hence, the people at St. Martin's-le-Grand were unable to return either of the letters to her.

Needless to say, she suffered a great deal of anxiety on account of this prolonged silence; so, after a week or ten days had elapsed, she wrote again to Herbert, and again, and yet again without receiving a reply.

These letters fell into Clara's hands.

At the moment of their arrival it was quite impossible for Herbert to read them; and having recognised Caroline's writing in the address, it was obviously out of the question for Clara to read them, and communicate their contents to Herbert, even had he been capable of comprehending them, which, at that time, he certainly was not; hence she put them away, intending to deliver them to him immediately upon his recovery.

Meanwhile she nursed and tended him by day and night.

No mother could have watched more tenderly over an only child, than she watched over him.

He wore round his neck the miniature, set in brilliants, and a wreath of blue-black hair, which, it will be remembered, he had shown me upon a certain memorable occasion. In his delirium he was wont to apostrophize the picture in terms of passionate endearment for hours together. The burthen of his theme was ever the same, and thus it ran—

“Let me kiss you, dearest, as bridegroom kisses bride.”

Every time she heard these words her proud heart would swell to bursting, and she would rush from the room, determined to quit the place, at once, and for ever.

Then came the reaction.

When she thought of his loneliness, his helplessness, she would exclaim—

“ Great heavens ! what would become of him, were I to abandon him ? ”

So she resolved not to leave him—not, at least, until he was well and strong, and then—for she was a devout Catholic—she would seek shelter in some “ dim cloister,” where hearts like hers oft find refuge beneath the shadow of the cross.

This was one picture, but there was another and a brighter one—artistic triumphs, love rewarded, conjugal happiness—and so time passed in alternations of despair and love, with hope still beckoning, in the far beyond.

When Mrs. Le Blanc arrived, her presence silenced the breath of scandal which was beginning to coin the slander which as yet it did not dare to propagate.

Herbert progressed so slowly towards recovery, that the doctor urged immediate removal. An invalid carriage was, therefore, secured, the journey was effected without danger or difficulty, and poor Jack and his guardian angels took up their quarters at one of the principal hotels in Harrogate.

A most unfortunate *contretemps* occurred on the road.

At Church Fenton, the direction was torn off from one of Clara’s trunks. It miscarried, and was lost.

Unfortunately, this box contained her writing case, and those letters of Caroline’s before referred to. Trifling as this loss may appear, it was destined to bear serious consequences !

Now that I look back on those troubled times, I think that I was wrong, not to have gone to Herbert myself at once, or at least to have written him ; but I,

too, was stabbed in the tenderest part, and my mind was so disturbed with conflicting emotions that, for her sake, perhaps more than my own, I stood aloof and made no sign.

Once, indeed, I did, with great pain to my own feelings, suggest to Clerehead to drop a line to Mrs. Le Blanc, to enquire how things were progressing, but I don't think it was in him (certainly it was not at that time) to comprehend the purity and self-sacrifice of such a nature as Clara's. At any rate he was in a savage mood, and blurted out—

“Ah! the women, the cursed women! They're all alike—all alike!”

That any one should dare to refer to Her in such terms was to me a profanation.

My reply was about as brief as it could be made.

And so our interview ended in anger, on both sides.

Caroline was meanwhile becoming sorely distressed at Herbert's continued silence.

She consulted me on the subject frequently.

Of course, I dared not tell her that her rival had usurped her place—that would have been fatal to “Orpheus”—and amidst all my troubles, I had still an author's anxiety for the fate of the first offspring of his muse. Therefore, when she told me that she had resolved to go down to Kingstown, on the Sunday prior to the production of the play, I begged her, for her own sake—for mine—for the sake of the piece—to postpone her visit, at least until after the first night, and she consented, most reluctantly, to be guided by my advice.

The morning after “Orpheus” was brought out,

however, she took the nine o'clock express for Kingstown.

Four hours later she was in the hall of the Railway Hotel.

The "ghoul," who had not forgotten her contemptuous treatment, encountered Caroline as she was going upstairs, and glowering at her with a malicious grin, growled out—

"You're a day after the fair, m'm!"

"Allow me—," said Caroline. "I wish to see Mr. Herbert."

"You can't see him here. He's taken his hook, with the other one."

"The other one? What other?"

"Why the other woman, of course. She's quite put your nose out of joint, my lady, I can tell you."

"I don't quite understand you. Mr. Herbert, you say, has gone. Gone, and with whom, pray?"

"With whom? Why, a fine madam who called herself his sister, but who the doctor tells me, is Miss Clara Trevor."

This dreadful creature, I suppose, must have had some particle of humanity left in her, for there was something in Caroline's face which caused her to say—

"Don't look like that, lass. There's as good fish in the sea as ever com'd out on it, and a fine young wench like you can allays get plenty o' chaps, I'se warrant. Have a glass o' sherry, or a nip o' cherry brandy!"

Caroline didn't start or speak. She only gave a strange, far-away smile, and walked straight away, to the ladies' waiting-room at the station.

There she sat down, and to all appearance fell

asleep. For an hour or more, she didn't move hand or foot.

The old widow who had charge of the room was alarmed and tried to rouse her.

At last, she succeeded in forcing a tablespoonful of brandy through her lips.

For a time, she sat dazed, and still, and quiet. Opposite her, was an illustrated bill of some emigration company, something about Manitoba. She kept spelling Manitoba, and persistently spelt it with two n's, thus—Man-nitoba.

All at once she heard a bell, and the scream of a departing engine, which awoke her, from her trance.

"What train is that?" she enquired, anxiously.

"The express for London, miss."

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, as she sprang to her feet, "I've missed the train! What will they do? What will they do?"

She consulted the station-master; there was no possibility of getting to town until eleven at night, that was certain.

Half an hour later I received the following telegram:—

"Railway Station,

"Kingstown.

"Have unfortunately missed my train. No means of getting to town until eleven o'clock to-night. So sorry."

Rushing over to Clerehead's chambers I showed him the telegram.

"What's to be done?" I inquired.

"Done?" he replied, "done? Why, have a special,

of course. Let me see—what's the time? Three o'clock; we've four hours to the good. Here, take this cheque—no, we'll go together. Hi! Hansom!"

He stopped two minutes at the telegraph-office at Charing Cross, and wired to her thus—

"Don't distress yourself. They keep capital soup, and decent dry sherry, at the refreshment-room; by the time you have had a plate of the one and a glass of the other, a Special train will be ready for you. Penarvon and I await you at Euston Square."

This done, we bowled down to the station in a quarter of an hour. In another quarter of an hour, the railway people telegraphed that the Special was on its way from Kingstown.

"Since we are here," said Clerehead, "we may as well stay. Let's go to the hotel and have a snack. Why, Bob, you are like a sick monkey. Confound it all, don't be so down in the mouth; it's sure to come right in the end. That fella' Herbert's a lucky beggar, I admit, to have two such women running after him; but he can't marry 'em both at once—at least, not unless he goes to Utah."

To this sort of rubbish I had to listen for three mortal hours.

At last the train was signalled, and we left the hotel to meet it.

Caroline was very pale, but quite calm and collected.

"I'm so sorry; Mr. Clerehead," she said, "but really I couldn't help it."

"I'm sure you couldn't," he replied, pleasantly; "but don't say another word about it. Here's the cab! now pick yourself up, and—what is it your precious Bard says, Penarvon?"—

“ ‘Bend up each corporal agent to this terrible feat.’

To-night is a great night. We're going to have the Prince and Princess, her father, the Duke, and Grand Duchess, the Czarewitch, the King of the Hellenes, the Grand Old Man and ‘the missus,’ the Poet Laureate, the American Minister, the Chinese Legation, the Nepaulese Ambassador, and the King of the Cariboo Islands; in fact, you'll be like Mars and Talma, at Buonaparte's show at Erfurt, when they acted before a cock-pit of kings! ”

When we arrived at the stage-door he said—

“That's right—there you are. Now go and have forty winks on the sofa; we'll see that you are called at half-past seven, and Penarvon shall send you in a cup of that wonderful Japanese tea, that he keeps in his den, and is so stingy about.”

Twelve o'clock must always come, and at last it did come, on that awful night; (for it was an awful night for Caroline), yet I never saw her act better in my life.

Poor child! how she must have suffered! My tortured heart sympathized with hers, for I saw that she acted with death in her soul.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE LOST LETTERS."

"It is little rift within the lute
That by-and-bye, will make the music mute,
And, ever widening, slowly silence all."

WITHIN twenty-four hours of Herbert's arrival at Harrogate, the absence of noise, and the purer atmosphere, asserted themselves, and he began to mend rapidly.

At or about this time, Clara saw the London papers, teeming with flaming accounts of Caroline's *début*.

The reader may recollect our visit to the Frivolity, and Miss Trevor's appreciation of the class of performance she saw there. It must be remembered, too, that she was under the firm impression, that Caroline had deserted the man who loved her; and now the cup of her offences was filled to overflowing. Nor did I escape unscathed; Clara's anger at my complicity in lending my name to the authorship of such rubbish, as my unfortunate "Orpheus," especially, in connection with her rival, excited her anger beyond all reasonable bounds.

Day after day, Clerehead, by all the artifices in which he was so profound an adept, attracted public attention in the journals, town and country, to the *débutante's* triumphs. There was an "*on dit*" here,

an anecdote there, till her name was on every tongue ; but no tongues dealt with it so acrimoniously as those of the two ladies at Harrogate. I think, if anything, Mrs. Le Blanc was the more virulent of the two.]

Although she didn't know her, hadn't even seen her, in her eyes poor Caroline was already the most depraved of women.

This inveterate prejudice, however, did not allay Clara's anxiety about the lost letters. She pestered the railway authorities from morning till night ; she telegraphed here, there, everywhere ; still no sign of the missing trunk.

What was to be done ?

Obviously, as soon as Herbert was sufficiently recovered, he must be made acquainted with the facts, whatever might be the issue ; meanwhile, all that could be done now, was to stir up the railway people incessantly, and to wait for his recovery, and then make a clean breast of it.

The ladies kept watch alternately over their patient.

Early one morning in September, during Mrs. Le Blanc's vigil, outworn with fatigue and anxiety, she had fallen asleep.

Presently, she was awakened by the carolling of the birds without. The sun was trying to peep through the closed shutters ; so she rose, and plucking the curtains aside, admitted the ruddy beams, which filled the room with life and light.

As she turned, she saw Herbert sitting up in bed, his eyes wide open, and fixed upon her with a curious and enquiring gaze.

" Where am I—and where is She ? " he tremulously enquired.

Astonishment, for a moment, deprived her of the power of speech.

He paused, and then querulously demanded—

"Why don't you speak? And who are you, woman?"

"I am the nurse."

"And *She*—where is *She*?"

"Here!" she replied, as Clara entered.

She stood, just as she had stood years ago, on the threshold of the Theatre House—all uncertain of her welcome. He didn't speak, but the silence was enough. It told her, as clearly as words could speak, that *She* was not the "*She*" he had asked for, and had hoped to see. The big tears trickled down her cheeks in silence.

These "speechless messengers" went straight to his heart. He had never seen her since the night of "The Rival Queens," when they had parted in silence, if not in anger. All this passed through his brain like the lightning's flash, and instinct, or some finer faculty, enabled him to divine intuitively the delicacy of the situation.

Strengthening his voice, he said—

"Miss Trevor."

She drew herself up in the old attitude of haughty reserve (how well he knew it!)

"Clara," he continued; (he had never called her "Clara" before.)

Ere the word had left his lips, she was beside him, holding his poor wasted hand in her own.

"How kind, how good you are," he continued. "I feel, I know, I ought to be grateful, though I am not quite sure even where I am, or how I came here. Was

it the fire last night? Or was it the 'Rival Queens'? Forgive me, but I think——"

"Don't think of anything now, please," she said, "until you are strong and well. In a day or two you shall know all."

"One thing I must know, or I shall die. Where is *She*? Not dead, not dead! For the love of Heaven! say not dead!"

"No, not dead."

"Thank God, for that!—and she is well, I hope?"

"And well."

"Thank you, once more; you are very good to me."

He took her hand, and kissed it humbly.

Next day he got up, and the next. Although pale, and worn, and wasted, he was sufficiently recovered now to remain up a few hours daily.

Here I might describe, at length, the subtle process, by which these two women avoided all mention of the "other one," until, with returning strength, his poor heart began to hunger after her, and would not be denied. Enough, that for seven days they held him at bay; but they could not hold him off for ever.

On the morning of the eighth day, Clara had been reading "The Idylls of the King" to him.

When she had finished—

"Clara," he said (he always called her "Clara" now), "I am strong, and I must know all. The other day, you told me, *She* was not dead."

"No, she is not dead," she replied, and then she muttered through her closed lips and clenched teeth—"Would to Heaven *I* were! God help him! What can I say? I dare not tell him—he would hate me!"

"So long as she's not dead," he answered, "I can

bear anything. Tell me, please, tell me where is she?"

"You are sure you can bear it?"

"Have I not said?"

"She is in London."

"London! So she is in London? What is she doing there?"

"This will explain;" and she handed him the *Times*, with a long notice upon the performance of "Orpheus," containing a description of Caroline's person, her costume, her singing, her dancing, &c.

He read it, without the slightest apparent trace of emotion, and, rising, left the room without one word.

How cruel are even the best men and women, when they love!

He knew—he must have known—that Clara loved him, yet his jealous anger made him oblivious of all her care and kindness, made him pass her by without even a look.

She knew he loved Caroline, yet she had not spared him this cruel pang. For all that, I verily believe, had he vouchsafed one sign of sympathy, she would have told him, then and there, of the miscarriage of those unfortunate letters, which would have explained all. The golden moment passed, never to return.

From that time forth the name of Caroline was never mentioned by either. She was as one dead to both.

As for him, when after that fateful moment, he reached the privacy of his own chamber, disdain gave way to grief, grief changed to anger, anger to despair, which culminated in the ravings of a madman.

The situation appeared so black against Caroline,

that he felt assured, convinced, that he had been abandoned by the woman on whom he had lavished the full fruition of a life's love. She had left him—left him to die for all she cared—amongst strangers; deserted him without a shadow of apology, excuse, or explanation. Nay, more; she, his affianced wife, had degraded herself, (and him by implication), by participating in this loathsome exhibition of carnal effrontery—for so he regarded my poor “Orpheus”—and, to enhance the infamy of the affair, the friend of his boyhood had absolutely perpetrated the miserable abortion of a play, selected to consummate her shame, and his degradation!

If, instead of giving way to these ravings of a dis-tempered mind, my unfortunate friend had written three lines to Caroline, or myself, all would have been explained, but his insensate pride arose like an iceberg between us; and from that time, to the bitter end, he entrenched himself in a barrier of impregnable and disdainful silence.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARREST.

“Gaoler, look to him ; tell not me of mercy.”

HARROGATE is a dull and depressing place at the best of times, but Clara would have made Stonehenge a palace, and Salisbury Plain, the Garden of Eden, for the man she loved, had he only loved her in return.

His heart, however, was far away. Courteous and even grateful for her kindness, he always was, but, gratitude is a sorry substitute for love.

Whenever they went abroad, she was the cynosure of all eyes. Every one flattered and admired her, save only he ; all hearts were open to her, save only his. She might have chosen from many men—some younger, all richer in the world’s gifts than he—yet she passed them by with easy disdain, to pour forth the effluence of her beauty, the fair, first love of her virgin heart, the fervour of her loving, noble nature at his feet, and there the treasure lay, in the dust, unrequited, and almost unnoted.

Sometimes she angrily enquired of herself—

“What glamour is there about this man that I should love him so ?”

Alas ! she knew not—she only knew that she loved ! With him alone was life—without him all was darkness, desolation, and despair.

As for him, his pride revolted at being a woman's pensioner. The position was becoming more irksome daily, and at length he found it absolutely unendurable.

At this period, Clerehead took it into his head to run down to see them.

I think he went, as much to satisfy his mind as to whether his suspicions about Clara had any foundation, as out of sympathy for Herbert.

Clerehead was soon undeceived, but his visit proved a boon to them both, and indeed to me as well, for in a day or two, he wrote me a most genial and sympathetic letter, which took a load of misery from my mind.

Both Clara and Jack were fond of horse exercise, so was Clerehead. The first day after his arrival, they rode out together, on a trio of sorry hacks.

By that night's post, he wrote to a friend in the neighbourhood, who immediately invited them to join the meet at Knaresboro' two days after, when he provided each of them with a splendid mount.

Clerehead's equitation was certainly not brilliant, but he kept his seat, and rode straight to hounds.

Clara and Herbert, however, were "native and to the manner born." She looked superb in her riding-habit, besides which, she rode like an Amazon, while, as for him, he sat like a Centaur. They bounded over brooks, ditches, and five-barred gates, like thistle down, and they were in at the death, neck and neck, with their noble host, from whom they received so cordial a welcome, that they followed the hounds at every meet, during the remainder of their stay in Harrogate.

Fresh air and exercise were the elixir of life to Jack ; so he began to recover rapidly and to look something like his old self.

One shadow hovered over all—Caroline! Her name was never mentioned. On the one hand, Herbert's wretched pride intervened; on the other, Clerehead's policy prevailed. Instinctively he felt, indeed, he knew, that if Herbert had the power, he would have annulled her engagement at the Frivolity there and then; so, tacitly, but by mutual consent, at the very moment when a few frank words would have made everything clear, pride and policy combined to prevent explanation.

At length, it was time for Clerehead to return to town. The night previous to his departure, after a long private consultation with Clara, he tackled Jack over a bottle of claret and a cigarette.

"Herbert," said he, "it's time for you to be up and doing, or people will begin to forget there's such a fellow in the world. The physic to cure you, is a dose of that 'blessed Bard' of yours. I'll organize a tour for you, and Miss Trevor, in a few of the best towns, that will realize three or four thousand pounds, in the course of as many months."

"But," replied Herbert, "I've no properties, no dresses."

"Never mind that; I'll send a clever little Frenchman of mine down, when I get back, and he'll soon fig you up."

"But, my dear Clerehead, I've no money."

"But I have lots! and what's the use of money if you can't use it to pleasure yourself and your friends? I'll arrange all about it, and you shall pay me, when you please, and how you please. Meanwhile here's a couple of open cheques which I've signed; fill 'em up as you please. I know you don't want to be under an

obligation to a woman—no man that's a man ever does ; for women—bless their hearts !—are kittle-cattle ; but, there, there, you know as much about 'em as I do. Now, it's no use talking ; I mean to have my own way, so spare your breath. I'm off to town to-morrow, hours before you are stirring, so good-bye, and good luck, old man."

And before Herbert could get a word in or out Clerehead was gone.

With the aid of the telegraph, in four-and-twenty hours, he arranged for a tour of four months, to commence in a fortnight's time.

Herbert was impatient to be again in harness, and Clara was more than delighted at the prospect. She was about to renew her delightful studies of the great old masters. Beyond, and above all this, she was once more about to act with "Him !"

The day after Clerehead's departure, the Frenchman came to Harrogate, and arranged Jack's costumes.

On his return to town, the little man sent down his wife, and a couple of young women, with Clara's magnificent wardrobe, and what with trimming, revising, altering, &c., the fortnight passed rapidly and pleasantly.

Thanks to one of Clerehead's cheques, Jack was enabled to make the ladies understand that they were his guests, at the hotel, besides which, he insisted on taking their railway tickets for the ensuing journey to Claremount, and thus commenced their campaign.

Mr. Thompson, the manager, met them at the station, and accompanied them to the King's Head, where he had secured apartments for them.

They were to open in "Much Ado About Nothing."
When the rehearsal was over they looked in at the

box-office to see the plan. Every place was taken for the opening night, and, indeed, for nearly every night of the engagement.

Herbert was elate and confident, and Clara was delighted.

Mrs. Le Blanc, who took charge of the household arrangements, had ordered a light, early dinner. As soon as it was over, Clara retired for her siesta, leaving Herbert to take his forty winks on the sofa—a process he never omitted, when he had to act.

The ladies went early to the theatre, giving the waiter strict injunctions to take Jack a cup of tea, at six o'clock.

At the Theatre Royal, Claremount, the managerial heart rejoiced exceedingly. In front, the audience were packed like herrings in a barrel; behind, the people had got their "war paint" on.

Half-past seven o'clock had arrived.

The decks were cleared, and ready for action. The call-boy, who had the advantage of being normally deaf, and abnormally stupid, made the usual calls outside Herbert's dressing-room, knocking loudly at the door each time; and, of course, took it for granted, poor lad, that Benedick was ready to begin.

The overture was finished, the last call made, and up went the curtain.

Clara, arrayed in her gorgeous costume—bodice and train of ruby velvet, with a Moorish petticoat, of crimson and gold, upon a white ground—made a Titianesque blaze of light and beauty, as she came sweeping down the stage.

She had a tremendous reception. The words came rippling forth like music, the repartees flashed from

her lips like stilettos, laugh followed laugh, till Leonato said, "You will never run mad, niece;" and she replied, "No, not till a hot January."

Then Don Pedro was announced. The march commenced; it grew louder and louder, until the Prince and his suite were on the stage. And then—there was no Benedick!

She looked anxiously round. "Where could he be?" Her woman's instinct suggested, "The artful fox! He is waiting to make a separate entrance, so as to enhance his reception."

At length his cue was given. Leonato said, "Her mother hath many times told me so."

Then came a pause of embarrassment, then a dead silence, amidst which she rapidly left the stage, and enquired of the prompter—

"Where's Mr. Herbert?"

"Don't know, ma'am."

"Has he not been called?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Without another word, she rushed round to his dressing-room, on the opposite side of the stage, and dashed open the door. Benedick's costumes were carefully laid out, everything prepared for the performance, but, alas! no Benedick.

The thought flashed through her mind—

"Good heavens! they've not called him at the inn!"

Snatching her cloak from her dresser, and throwing it over her shoulders, she darted over to the stage-door, calling as she rushed out—

"Drop the curtain and play another overture," and fast as her feet—her poor, tiny feet (clad only in her thin, white satin shoes)—could carry her, she ran

towards the hotel, hotly followed by the unfortunate manager.

Let us now see what had become of the missing Benedick.

At about half-past six a great, coarse, ill-favoured fellow, burst into the room where Herbert was sleeping and roughly placed his hand upon his shoulder. Springing to his feet, Jack exclaimed—

“Hands off! Who are you, and what do you want here?”

“I want ninety-six pounds odd, or you,” the man replied; “but I’d rather have the dibs, so you’d better fork out. Here you are,” continued he, flourishing an ominous-looking legal document. “There’s no mistake about this.”

At first Herbert couldn’t comprehend the position.

“There’s no arrest for debt now-a-days.”

“Ain’t there, though? That’s all my eye, and my elbow! P’raps you never heerd o’ sich a thing as contempt o’ Court? Oh! dear, no; how very verdant we are!”

Then he explained, without circumlocution, that Herbert’s departure from Kingstown was so sudden and unexpected, that the benevolent bailiff there was taken off his guard. The poor fellow was responsible to the bill-discounting harpy, hence he was compelled to send some of his subordinates, to secure the money, or the man.

At this moment, a luminous idea struck Jack. Clerehead’s cheque! Happy thought!

“What’s the total?” he enquired.

“Ninety-six quid, and about a couple of pounds more for additional xes.”

"What's your name?"

"Jonas Bindlater."

Taking pen and ink, Herbert filled up the cheque for ninety-eight pounds, and handed it to the bailiff, who burst into a roar of laughter, as he exclaimed—

"Well, you must think me a mug! How do I know this is worth the paper it's writ on?"

With great self-control, Herbert replied—

"Perhaps you'll take it down to the landlord, and ask him to cash it."

"That ain't half a bad idea. Here, I say, Sam," said he, calling in a fellow who remained outside mounting guard, "take this to the bar, and axe the landlord to square it."

Presently the messenger returned with a curt "Mr. Jenkins ain't in, and the missus don't seem to see it."

After an awkward pause, Herbert said—

"Well, I suppose you had better come with me to the theatre, and let me see the manager."

"See the d—l!" roared the ruffian. "You might as well try to get blood out of a stone. Why, I nailed him hisself this mornin' for fifty quid, and it was like drawing his eye teeth to get the coin."

"At least, you'll permit me to consult my friends?"

"Can't do that; my instructions is imperative. So, if you can't shell out, you'd better look sharp, for chokey's twenty miles off, and it'll be as much as we can do to catch the last train. As for this," returning the cheque, "you can keep it to curl your hair with! Cab's at the door; there's two on us, so you'd better take it quietly, and look alive."

Restraining himself with a violent effort, Herbert wrote a hasty note to Clara, begging her to explain the situation to the unfortunate manager, and to request

him, if possible, to arrange for his immediate release, so as to admit of his acting the next night. Ringing the bell, he gave the note to the waiter, with directions to deliver it at once.

Ten minutes later poor Jack was in the train, and on his way to "durance vile."

By the time his train had started, Clara had reached "The King's Head."

Springing up the stairs, two or three steps at a time, she reached the drawing-room. It was quite dark, and she couldn't see her hand before her.

"Wake up! wake up!" she cried. "The stage is waiting! Where are you?"

Groping blindly in the dark, she placed her hand upon the sofa. It was empty!

With an exclamation of dismay, she felt her way over to the fireplace, reached the bell-pull, screaming—"Lights! Lights!" and alarmed the whole household.

The landlady came quickly to the room with lights, followed by poor Thompson, and the idiot of a waiter, who all at once remembered the note, which he had forgotten to deliver.

"Dear me," he commenced, "Mr. Herbert giv me a letter an hour or two ago, afore he went out, with them three strange men. Yes! to be sure—"

Before the blockhead was half through his explanation, Clara tore the note open, read it, and without a word, handed it to the wretched manager.

"My God!" exclaimed he, "I am a ruined man. We've been doing awfully for the past month, and every place is booked for the next twelve nights. In fact, I had arranged to have two more rows of stalls for Friday. Oh! Miss Trevor, what shall I do?"

"First tell me, has the last train gone to Boling broke?"

"It went an hour and a half ago."

"Very well." Then turning to the affrighted waiter she said—"Go, order me a fly and a pair of horses to be at the door immediately—*immediately*, do you hear?"

As the booby jumped out of the room, she continued, "Now, Mr. Thompson, go back, take this letter, and tell the audience the truth. Give them tickets for to-morrow night, or return their money. Say that, please Heaven, Mr. Herbert will return to-morrow, to carry out his engagement, and I shall be with him, if I'm alive! See, there is no lack of money," and, rushing into her own room she returned, flourishing Bank of England notes for £400 before his astonished eyes.

Poor Thompson stood trembling and hesitating for a moment.

At last he requested the landlady to leave the room.

When alone with Clara he gasped out—

"Madam, I can't return the money. I was myself compelled to borrow over £50 from the box office this morning to enable me to keep out of jail."

"Take this!" she said, giving him a note for £100, and off he went, to make his peace with the public, as best he might.

By this time, the conveyance was at the door. Clara sprang downstairs, and leaped into the carriage, not even pausing to change her dress. Her directions were short, emphatic, and quickly given, and, away went the coach fast as the horses could speed on their way to Bolingbroke.

CHAPTER VIII.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE PRISON.

“Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
Remember to have heard.”

To add to Herbert's misfortunes, the engine broke down on the journey, a delay of some hours occurred, and he didn't arrive at Bolingbroke till nearly midnight!

To make matters still pleasanter, the jail was a mile from the station; it was raining cats and dogs, and a cab was not to be had for love or money. Of course he was drenched to the skin before he reached the prison, so, in point of fact, were his friends the bailiffs—there was some comfort in that.

Evidently, there is sometimes as much difficulty in getting *into* a prison, as in getting *out* of one.

After ringing and hammering at the wicket for nearly a quarter of an hour, a small window above the portal was opened, and a gruff voice growled out—

“What the blazes do you mean by disturbing people at this hour of the night?”

“Can't help it; train broke down,” Bindlater replied.

"Well, you'll have to wait until I get my togs on, anyhow," replied the voice.

Another quarter of an hour, in the cold, rain, and darkness.

At length, after unlocking of locks, withdrawal of bolts and bars, the wicket-door is thrown open, and the owner of the voice aforesaid appears. A great ill-looking fellow, with a red nose, reddish, ferrety, evil eyes, a miserable thatch of stubbly red hair, and mutton-chop whiskers to match. This gentleman is accompanied by two burly turnkeys, who are apparently but half awake. The bailiff presents some legal document. Mr. Redhead takes a dark lantern from one of the turnkeys, hastily inspects the document, then flashes the bull's-eye on Herbert's face, and enquires curtly—

"Is your name John Herbert?"

"John Herbert is my name," is the equally curt reply.

Redhead disappears in silence with Bindlater, for some occult ceremony in reference, it is to be presumed, to said document. Herbert remains in the corridor in custody of the assistant bailiff, and the turnkeys, who glare at one another, in grim and gloomy silence.

In five minutes, Redhead returns in violent altercation with Bindlater. The bailiff is appealing for shelter, alleging that he and his men are wet through, and half dead with cold. Redhead recommends them to seek for lodgings in a certain locality which is by no means deficient in warmth or extent of accommodation, and the wretched bailiffs are bundled out of the building into the storm, which is now falling in one steady downpour.

Rearrangement of bolts and bars.

Then Redhead yelps—

"Bring him along."

Herbert accepts the situation as inevitable, and walks between the two turnkeys, down the dimly-lighted passage. They approach an office; then more drawing of bolts and unlocking of locks.

Redhead enters. Herbert is about to follow him, but falls back at a gruff—

"Stay where you are. Now answer."

And the fellow sits down, pen and ink in hand, writing Herbert's replies.

"Your name is John Herbert?"

"I have already told you so. And now I wish to see some one in authority."

"Oh! you'll see some-one in authority quite time enough. Now, what have you got in your pockets?"

"It seems to me," says Herbert, very grimly, "that I've got my hands there."

"We don't want any of your lip here. Turn his pockets out."

The two turnkeys make a rush; but no man as yet had ventured to lay hands on John Herbert with impunity. So he sends them sprawling on either side, as he says, quietly—

"A little of that will go a long way with me. Now, what are the contents of my pocket to you?"

"Everything!" Redhead growls. "It's my dooty to enter everything you have about you, in this book."

"If you had said so at first," replied Jack, "you'd have saved your friends a shaking." With that he gave up his purse, containing Clerehead's cheque, a cigar case, a penknife, and his watch and chain, all of which Redhead entered in the book, desiring the prisoner to sign his name at the bottom of the page.

This formula complied with, the fellow resumed his interrogatories.

"Now, are you going on the county, or do you intend to keep yourself?"

"I fear I don't quite understand you."

"Do you mean to find your own grub, or d'ye mean to live on the prison fare?"

"I've no money—nothing but that cheque."

"Oh! cheques ain't no use here till they're passed through the bank. Besides, this ain't payable to you; it's payable to Bindlater, and he hasn't endorsed it. I shall have to see how you came by it."

Closing the book, and locking the door, the ruffian barks out—

"No. 75," and vanishes in the semi-darkness.

The prisoner is marched off in the opposite direction, between the two turnkeys. They go along a narrow passage, up a flight of stone steps, then out into the open somewhere, the rain still coming down. Another door is unlocked and unbarred, another corridor is passed, another flight of stone steps descended. This time prisoner misses his footing in the semi-darkness, stumbles, and is about to fall. As he recovers himself, one of his gentle janitors playfully exclaims—

"Blowed if he ain't tight, Bill! I thought he was."

A dozen paces more, and the other fellow calls out—

"Halt!"

He flashes his bull's-eye upon the door of a prison cell, barred with iron, studded with nails, and with a small grated aperture, above which is inscribed, "No. 75."

The door is thrown open, disclosing a small white-washed cell, about ten or twelve feet square, and proportionately high. By the light of the lantern, the

prisoner perceives a mattress, and some blankets, in a heap upon the ground.

"There you are," says one of the fellows. "You couldn't be served better in a dossing crib."

Before he has time to speak, Herbert is shot, like a sack of coals, on the floor of the cell.

The door closes with a bang, and he is left in darkness.

There is a noise of locking, bolting, barring, and retreating footsteps, followed by silence.

Then—oh, merciful dispensation of Providence!—Nature's blessed anodyne falls upon his weary eyelids—and he sleeps.

As the clock struck one, Clara's carriage crossed Bolingbroke Bridge. A quarter of an hour later, the coachman pulled up before the prison gates, the horses in a lather and smoking like steam.

The rain still came down in torrents, and except for the lightning, it was pitch dark. The driver tumbled down from the box and fumbled at the carriage door.

Clara thrust it open impatiently, bruising her poor little hand in the process.

Leaping out and feeling her way to the wicket, she began to tug violently at the bell-pull. There was no answer. She rang again and again, and yet again. Still no answer.

Ten minutes passed; it seemed to her ten ages.

Still one continual downpour.

By this time the driver was drenched to the skin, and benumbed with cold, hunger and fatigue.

"Beg parding, miss," said he, "but it's gittin' on for two o'clock. If you'd come to the White Hart, you might git a bed. It only means a few hours' difference to the gent, but it means life or death to you and me."

She was in no mood to reason, and rang the bell again impatiently.

Still no answer, and still the rain poured down incessantly.

At last the man said—

“Look here, laidy; this ain’t good enough for me. I’ve got the rheumatiz, and I can scarce stand with it now, it’s that awful. If I’d a-thought the night was a-going to turn out like this, I wouldn’t ha’ tuk this here job on no account, for it strikes me I shall be a dead ’un before the mornin’.”

“I’m so sorry, my good man. See, here’s money!”

“Money be blanked! I’ve got a wife and five bairns, and wot’s the use of all the money in the world to a man when his wife’s a widder? Oh! miss, if you ain’t got no compassion on me or yourself, have pity on them poor critters as have brought you all the way, four-and-twenty blessed miles, if it’s a hinch, without stoppin’, till they’ve scarcely got a leg to stand on between the pair on ’em. Look at ’em, they’re trimblin’ all over, poor beastesess.”

“So they are, my good man; poor things, so they are! See them taken care of; let them have food and shelter; get yourself to eat and drink. Go quickly, and, if possible, send me fresh horses with a fly, a cab, anything. Order me fires—do you hear—large fires. Go! As for me, I’ll stay and make these people hear me!”

Away staggered the poor horses, and again she pulled at the bell, which made noise enough now, one would have thought, to have awakened the Seven Sleepers.

Still no reply. Nothing could be heard above the storm.

For a moment, it seemed as if she were about to change her mind, for she called to the man---

"Come back! Come back!"

Alas! it was too late; he was out of sight and hearing.

Her dress was cut low on the neck. She had only light undergarments. All that interposed 'twixt her and the fury of the tempest was her cloak, which unfortunately was not even waterproof, and a shawl which the landlady had compassionately thrown over her head as she stepped into the fly.

By this time she was drenched from head to foot, freezing one moment, and aflame the next. The shuddering horror crept up her limbs till they trembled beneath her, so that she could scarcely keep her feet.

Again she rang the bell. She screamed, she shouted, she called on Heaven for help; but called in vain.

At last there came a momentary lull in the storm.

Pausing, from sheer exhaustion, and nerving herself for a supreme effort she seized the bell once more. The handle, which was heavy and of iron, came off in her hand!

With the recoil she staggered backward across the road. For one moment she leant panting and breathless against the wall, then she saw, above the portal of the prison, a window with a lighted lamp upon the sill inside. Summoning her remaining strength she hurled, with all her might, the iron handle through the window. Crash! Smash! went the glass in every direction, out went the light, and a volley of oaths and execrations arose in reply.

A moment later the evil face of Redhead appeared scowling through the window. With a string of foul-mouthed objurgations he demanded--

"What she meant by smashing the window? Who she was, and what the —— brought her there at that hour in the morning?"

She replied very humbly—

That she had come four-and-twenty miles through the rain to pay the money and to release Herbert; that he had been dangerously ill—at death's door; that even one night's imprisonment, might be fatal to him. In any case, she implored that if he could not be released, she might be admitted so as to be near him at daybreak.

The ruffian heard her to the end, and then said—

"Now look here, my good 'ooman, it 'ud serve you jolly well right to give you in charge, comin' and disturbin' a fella out on his sleep—a this'n; but there, I've had enough of this caper, so you'd better 'bunk;' anyhow, you don't lodge here."

With that he slammed the window, and the fragments of the broken glass fell upon her head. Her eyes flashed fire; she saw and heard no more. Tottering forward she fell prone upon her face, on the cold, wet, flagstones.

That night sheep and cattle were stricken dead on the mountain sides, trees and houses were blown down, and ships were wrecked and lost at sea. Yet there my poor darling lay while the lightning flashed, and "Heaven's artillery thundered in the skies," and the wind howled and shrieked, as if the Prince of the Air and his infernal host were astride the blast, and the cruel, soaking, piercing, blinding rain, still came down, as if another deluge was impending, and the gates of Heaven would never close again.

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CHAPTER I.

IN HADES (DAY THE FIRST).

“A prison! oh, how I loathe the hateful name,
The grave to honest men—the sink of shame.”

FORTUNATELY for Herbert he slept through the whole of his first night in prison till the clock struck six, when the noise awoke him. It was still dark. At first he only knew that he was cold and damp, and trembling as with an ague, but he had not the slightest idea where he was. Presently a gong thundered forth “Bang, bong! Bang, bong!” for fully five minutes. Still he remained dazed and shivering.

Five minutes later, he heard footsteps approaching, then a halt. The light of a bull’s-eye flashed through the small grated trap in the door, and a gruff voice roared out—

“No. 75, wake up!”

In a moment he remembered all—he was a prisoner!

No time was permitted for further reflection. The door of the cell was thrown open, and one of his acquaintances of the preceding night said, in a loud, imperious voice—

“Now then, stir your stumps, and turn out!”

Mechanically he obeyed, and stepped into the corridor amongst thirty or forty poor wretches, more or less unfortunate than himself. The door of his cell

was bolted and barred behind him, and he was led away with the others, to a place they called the gentlemen debtors' ward.

This was a spacious room with a concrete floor, some strips of cocoa-nut matting, a large oblong wooden table, a few dilapidated wooden chairs, some forms, a Bible, a printed list of the prison regulations pasted on the wall, and a high window, through which, by standing on a form, "our honourable friends of the lower house" (as one of the "gentlemen debtors" facetiously designated the felons) could be seen marching by, taking their morning "constitutional."

The warder in charge led Herbert to a sort of scullery, in which there was a large rough trough, and several wooden buckets filled with water. A bath was also pointed out to him, filled with something which looked like gravy soup, though it scarcely smelt so savoury. Fortunately he was spared that loathsome ordeal, although the pauper debtors, as a rule, were compelled to submit to it.

Provided with a coarse towel, and a piece of soap, he improvised the best toilette he could under the circumstances.

Returning to the large room, he found his fellow lodgers preparing their breakfast. Some were making coffee, some tea and toast, some were frying herrings or frizzling bacon, and all were seasoning their preparations with highly-flavoured jokes, or playful little blasphemies.

Two or three men sat apart, silent and sorrowful, evidently conscious of their degradation, but the majority were *canaille*, who seemed rather to enjoy the situation.

Fortunately no one had recognized Herbert. One fellow inquired in an audible whisper—

“Who’s the swaddy? Ain’t he a swell? Pity a cove like that can’t have a ward all to hisself.”

Grateful for small mercies, poor Jack was thankful that he was at least unknown to these dreadful people.

At eight o’clock the warder beckoned him out, and conducted him to breakfast in the paupers’ ward, where he found a pint of water-gruel, and four ounces of brown bread before him.

It will be remembered that he had just recovered from a dangerous illness, and was yet suffering from the effects of last night’s drenching.

“I can’t eat this,” he said.

“You’ll get nothing else here,” the warder replied.

Without a word Herbert rose and followed the man back to the gentlemen debtors’ ward.

By this time breakfast was in full blast, and Jack had time to notice his fellow prisoners.

He was more particularly struck with the appearance of three men who were not breakfasting with the rest.

The one was a fair, slender, consumptive-looking young man, who told him in the course of the day, that he was an artist (a lithographer, I think he said). The other was a venerable old gentleman of seventy and upwards—white-haired and white-bearded—a man who had evidently known better days. It added to Herbert’s own sufferings to see the hopeless, helpless misery of these two poor creatures.

The third—a greasy, slimy-looking mountain of flesh of fifty or sixty—from his seedy, semi-clerical garb, was evidently a broken-down parson. This ornament of the Church kept perpetually dodging about

like a cormorant, and poking his dirty fingers into every man's mess. All was fish that came to his net. He snatched a crust of bread here, a morsel of bacon or a scrap of fish there, a lump of sugar everywhere, devouring them with wolfish avidity. As for the cups of tea and coffee he guzzled, it was impossible to count them, but, numerous as they were, his insatiate maw "had stomach for them all."

Evidently this creature was the all-licensed buffoon of the goodly company. He buzzed about like a lazy blue-bottle, and, wherever he moved, a roar of ribald laughter greeted his full-flavoured witticisms, based principally upon copious quotations from the Song of Solomon, which he interpreted in the most literal and secular fashion, to the intense delight of his hearers. When he had stuffed his huge paunch as full as it could hold without absolutely bursting, he waddled to a corner, of which he had apparently the monopoly, and tumbled off to sleep like a gorged boa-constrictor.

At half-past ten, everybody was marshalled for prayers. Herbert fell in amongst the rest. Strict silence was enjoined. They were marched along like felons, and when they reached the church they were placed in pews merely separated from their "honourable friends" by a wooden partition.

After church, walking exercise followed in the grounds; then he was taken to the paupers' dinner at half-past two o'clock.

The *menu* consisted of four ounces of suet pudding, the like of brown bread, and two ounces of boiled potatoes. At the sight he turned away again without a word.

Church once more in the afternoon, then back to the ward to sit alone—always alone—his sense of delicacy and even decency wounded to the quick by the swinish herd around him.

At eight he was taken to his cell, and locked up for the night.

Again “great Nature’s second course” came to his help, and sealed his eyes, and soothed his tortured brain.

Thus ended his first day in Hades!

CHAPTER II.

'TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH.

“ Make a fire within.
Fetch hither all my boxes in my closet ;
Death may usurp on nature many hours,
And yet the fire of life kindle again
The o'er-pressed spirits.”

MEANWHILE, what had become of Clara ?

Night had gone down in storm and tempest, but the day arose in cloudless sunshine, yet there she lay, even where she had fallen hours before, cold and motionless, and, to all appearance, dead as stone.

The clock struck six ; the city was alive and stirring. Presently a man of middle age, poorly clad, apparently a navigator, but with that indescribable swing which denotes a sailor, came rolling along the street, which ran parallel with the left-hand side of the prison.

Mick Cassidy, for so he was called, was smoking a cutty pipe ; he carried a pickaxe and a spade on his left shoulder, and in his right hand was a small bass, which contained some workman's tools and his frugal breakfast. Judging from his dilapidated garments and his pinched and weather-beaten face, poor Mick's lines had not been cast in pleasant places of late.

As he entered the main street, on which the front of he jail abutted, turning sharply to the right, he nearly

stumbled over the prostrate figure which lay before him. As he started back, the pickaxe and the spade fell from his shoulder, and he dropped the bass, which contained his humble commissariat.

"Holy St. Patrick!" he exclaimed, "what's this? It's a woman, shure. P'raps she was afther liftin' her finger wanst too often, last night. Well! they all do it; it's a family failin'! The poor craytures are fond of barley. Anyhow, she'll take no harm in the sunshine, d—l a bit!

"She'll sleep it off, and be as right as a trivet in an hour or two."

As he stooped to take up his pickaxe and spade, he caught sight of a satin slipper, a silk stocking, and the daintiest foot and ankle in the world, peeping out of an embroidered petticoat, all bestained with rain, and bedraggled with mire.

"Mother of mercies!" he exclaimed, "what's this?" And the honest fellow (a man, I dare swear, every inch of him!) whipped off his miserable slop, and covered up the dear little foot and ankle as if they were relics of the Madonna; then gently lifting up the shawl and cloak, and seeing the face and form beneath, he continued—"Oh! look at the pearls and the goold! But what are they to the pearls in her mouth, and the goold in her hair? Oh! luk at the hands of her! and the arms of her! and the neck of her! and the face of her! The face, that's like the face of our Blessed Lady herself!"

He felt her wrists, and placed his ear to her neck, till he heard the faint pulsation of her heart still beating.

"The Lord be praised!" he cried. "She's not dead this time, anyhow."

He took off his jacket and waistcoat and wrapped them round his bass, and placed them tenderly beneath her head. This done, he went to the prison-door to ring for help. Unfortunately, the handle, as we know, was gone.

"Wirras throe! What'll I do now? Shure it's the polis I'd betther be afther." And turning towards the town, by accident, he kicked before him a small purple morocco purse, with the initials "C.T." in gold.

"Murther in Irish! What's this?"

He opened the purse, found in it three Bank of England notes for £100 each, and, half a dozen sovereigns or more. Standing still for a moment, he scratched his head as he muttered—

"Winther's comin' on. Nora's perishing for want of a shawl, and the childher's feet are on the ground. Next week the rint's due, and just wan o' thim bits of paper 'd make a man o' me."

He paused, irresolute for a moment, then he resumed—

"Make a man o' me? It's a scoundhrel it 'd make o' me—a miserable sthrawneen that 'd never dare to luk the wife and childher in the face agin."

With that, he ran off in the direction of the city.

In a few minutes he returned with a smart, intelligent policeman, who took stock of the situation at once.

"Mick," said he, "don't you move nor stir from the spot till I come back."

"Be aisy; d—l a fut will I stir out o' this."

By-and-bye, people began to dribble up, one by one, and two by two. At length, a crowd gathered round,

but Mick mounted guard with his pick-axe, and they gave him a wide berth until the policeman returned with a stretcher, and a couple of his comrades. They "bore her gently on the bier," hiding her from the mob, and so carried her to the police-station.

The Chief Constable was a young Scotchman named Macdonald, just appointed to the post. Fortunately, for some seven or eight years previously, he had been at the head of the detective department at Rosemount.

"Now what's all this about?" he inquired.

Then plucking the shawl from the face of the recumbent figure, he exclaimed—

"Jerusalem! why it's Miss Trevor!"

He waited for no explanation, but turning to the men he roared out—

"Send for Dr. MacFarlane. Tell him to come as it the d—l were at his heels! Clear out!"

The men left the room as he called upstairs—

"Mary, Mary! my love, come down; and tell Jeannie to bring hot water, mustard, brandy, flannel, burnt feathers, and deuce knows what all!"

Down comes a little, bright-eyed, fair-haired woman, attended by a strapping, ginger-headed Scotch lassie. To their good offices Macdonald confides my darling, while he rejoins the men without, and demands an explanation. Then Mick Cassidy up and tells all he knows, handing over the purse and its contents.

Desiring the Inspector in charge to take the numbers of the notes, Macdonald called Mick aside, and gave him a sovereign.

"Here," said he, "don't go to work to-day. Go and get tight if you like, only don't make a beast of yourself, for if you're brought here you'll have to go

before the beak. I shall keep my eye on you, and see you're well paid for this day's work. What's your name?"

"Cassidy—Mick Cassidy, sir."

"Let me shake hands with you. You're a fine fellow—a d——d fine fellow, Mr. Mick Cassidy. Good-bye; God bless you. Get out!"

At this moment the doctor arrived—a little man with a huge bald head, the eye of a hawk, and the beak of an eagle.

"What's up? What's up, Mac?" he inquired.

"Mac" told him all, and took him into the room where Clara lay, in charge of his bonnie little wife and her handmaiden. My poor dear's eyes were closed, her lips were blue, and her teeth were set like a vice.

The doctor felt her pulse, lifted her eyelids, and shook his head.

"Is there any hope?" enquired Macdonald.

"Leave the room, and I'll see."

When Mac left the room the doctor took out his instruments and cut the shoulder-band of the left arm of Clara's dress. Placing a small glass tube beneath her armpit, he watched and waited a minute or two, then he withdrew the glass, looked at it, and smiled.

"Throw a shawl over her," he said to the women; then he sang out, "Come in, Mac; it's all right, my man."

"I'm glad to hear that," replied the other.

"Everything depends now on dispatch. The first thing to do is to get her to bed."

"Oh! I can do that in two minutes," said Mrs. Macdonald. "Come awa, Jeannie, woman, and gang ben, while I—"

Macdonald, with a tenderness and delicacy one would scarcely have expected, said—

“Nae, lassie, you’re used to this place, but yon poor leddy could never live beneath the shadow of these walls. We’d better get her awa at once. But you shall gang wi’ her, my bonnie dearie, so slip on your bonnet.

“Would you mind going on, doctor, to the White Hart? Order whatever you want. Never mind the expense, I’m answerable for all! We’ll be there in a quarter of an hour.”

Away went the doctor.

In a few minutes he had secured the best rooms in the hotel—a large bedroom and drawing-room communicating with each other. By his directions the furniture was rapidly cleared away from the sitting-room. A mattress was placed upon the floor, covered with blankets, and by its side a large slipper bath filled with hot water, two or three huge sponges, and a footpan full of mustard and hot water.

Mrs. Ogilvie, the landlady, a fine, matronly lady-like woman, was in waiting, attended by two chambermaids.

By this time Macdonald and his wife arrived in charge of Clara.

They had barely carried her upstairs, when a cab drove up, out of which sprang Mrs. Le Blanc and Thompson, the Claremount manager, in a dreadful state of excitement.

Of course Laura was dreadfully cut up when she saw Clara’s condition, but she soon recovered, and made herself quite at home with the doctor, who at once constituted her head nurse.

"Ladies," said he, "this young creature's life depends on you. Only carry out my instructions without fuss or blether, and you'll be worth all the doctors in England. Now then, turn her gently on her face. Stand clear."

And he took a pair of scissors from his case, and with one dexterous sweep cut through Clara's dress from head to foot. He then went to the mustard and water, emptied some of it into the slipper bath, and put his hand in.

"Too hot," he said; "give me that can of cold water. That'll do. I'm now going to prepare a cold pack for her in the next room. Now, madam, attend"—this to Mrs. Le Blanc. "Here's my watch. Please keep your eye on it. First, you'll put her in the slipper bath for ten minutes. Next, do you see this?" and he emptied a small bottle of colourless fluid into a wash-hand basin, in which he placed a sponge. "It's an acid, and a dangerous one, so mind how you use it. When you take her out you will sponge her from head to foot with this, then cover her with a couple of blankets for five minutes, neither more nor less. Time it to the moment. Then sponge the acid out with water as hot as your hands can bear. As soon as you've done, bring her into the next room, where the pack will be ready, that is, Mrs. Macdonald, if you will give me a hand?"

"Baith hands, doctor," replied the little woman, as she bustled off.

He paused on the threshold, as he said to Mrs. Le Blanc—

"You understand me, madam?"

"Perfectly."

"I feel I may rely on you."

"You may."

"Very well, then, go ahead."

Although his instructions were carried out to the letter, for some hours the issue was doubtful; and the doctor himself scarcely knew whether it would be life or death.

"I have done all that I can do," he said; "the rest is in the hands of Heaven!"

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE NEWS REACHED ME.

“On Rumour’s tongues continual slanders ride.”

WHILE my darling lay oscillating ’twixt life and death, whilst my dearest friend was shivering and starving amongst those jail-birds, I was lounging in my easy-chair, in my cosy chambers, toasting my feet before the fire, sipping my tea, and trifling with my ham and eggs.

At this moment Mrs. Gibson, the housekeeper, brought in “The Daily Scorchers.” After glancing over the telegrams, the first thing that caught my eye was the following sensational announcement:—

“By Special Telegram from our own Correspondent.

RIOT AT A THEATRE.

**GREAT LOSS OF LIFE AND DESTRUCTION OF
PROPERTY.**

**THE EMINENT TRAGEDIAN, MR. JOHN HERBERT, AR-
RESTED UPON A CHARGE OF ARSON AND MURDER.**

SUICIDE OF MISS CLARA TREVOR!”

I could scarcely collect my senses to read what followed.

I have extracted this precious composition from my note-book, exactly as it appeared, and here it is:—

"Last night, as Mr. Herbert, the tragedian, was on his way to the Theatre at Claremount to enact the part of Benedick, he was arrested upon a charge of arson and murder!

"It is rumoured that the beautiful and accomplished Miss Trevor, who was devotedly attached to the wretched man, upon hearing of his arrest, immediately became distraught, and committed suicide!

"It is certain that the unfortunate lady rushed off the stage in the midst of the performance, and was last seen running madly in the direction of the river, on the banks of which, her opera cloak was found, some hours later.

"The performance announced could not take place; and in consequence of the refusal of the manager to return the audience their money, a riot ensued, amidst which the theatre was sacked, great destruction of property occurred, one man was killed, and seventy or eighty persons were wounded. A large body of police was called in, under the direction of Chief-Constable Handley, and after some time order was restored."

One moment I stood dazed; the next I was in the Strand, hailing the first cab; half an hour later I was at King's Cross. Too late! The express had just gone! The next train did not leave town until five o'clock. I drove back to Clerehead's office; he was not there, so I scrawled a hasty note telling him of my departure, and at five o'clock I started for Claremount.

Immediately on my arrival, I rushed to the theatre. It was closed; but I gathered from the hall-porter, in addition to all the reader already knows, that Mrs. Le Blanc, and Thompson, the manager, had followed Clara to Bolingbroke, before I had even started from town. There was some comfort in that.

The last train had left hours ago, so I could not get away until the morning. There was no help for it but to put up at the "King's Head."

Mrs. Jenkins gave me fuller and more accurate information about the unfortunate occurrences of the previous night; and the poor old coachman, who had just got back, awfully knocked up, gave me the particulars of Clara's journey as far as he could, alleging

that he had ordered rooms for her at the "White Hart."

I telegraphed Mrs. Le Blanc, who replied, "If you wish to see her alive, you have not a moment to lose."

I would have started there and then, but there was no possibility of obtaining a conveyance; so I had to watch and wait until daybreak.

I shall never forget that night of horrors! Even were my life to stretch out to "the crack of doom."

By the first train I was on my way to Bolingbroke. I thought that miserable railway journey would never end; it seemed as if I could have walked the distance in half the time.

At last! at last, I reach my destination. Scarcely waiting for the train to stop, I leap forth. The people evidently think me mad, for the crowd opens and gives way. I spring into the first conveyance. "The White Hart! the White Hart!" I cry.

The poor, bony old hack shies every minute, and can scarcely keep his legs as he struggles along before the miserable ramshackle shandrydan to which he is yoked.

Presently we emerge into the High Street, at the opposite end of which I see the sign of "The White Hart" flapping in the wind. I spring out, leaving my tardy charioteer to follow at his leisure. I run, fast as my legs can carry me, some three or four hundred paces to the inn.

As I approach the archway, a little, bright creature, with fair hair and smiling face, greets me; I learn afterwards she is Macdonald's wife. Bless her heart! She seems to know me instinctively, for she calls out—

"This way, sir, this way, Mr. Penarvon!"

She flies before me; her feet scarce touching the ground; I follow fast as she can lead up the broad staircase. I have no lameness now; by God's blessing that day I recovered the use of my disabled limb, and have never been lame since.

She stops at a door; on the threshold I encounter a little man, with a large bald head, a huge aquiline nose, and keen bright eyes.

"The doctor!" cries my flying fairy.

"Only two words," I say. "Is she alive?"

"Alive."

"And safe?"

"Look!" says the doctor, as he throws the door wide open.

There stands Mrs. Le Blanc, a smile upon her face, and there lies my darling, pale as death, but breathing placidly as an infant.

I grasp her soft, white hand in mine. Thank God! it is warm and full of life. I cover it with kisses, I moisten it with tears; I fall upon my knees beside her, and my heart wells forth in prayers of gratitude to Him who has snatched her from the jaws of death and given her back to me.

CHAPTER IV.

IN HADES (DAY THE SECOND).

"I hear it—I see it, but it's a prodigy that nature can't believe."

THAT very morning at six o'clock, an hour before I started for Bolingbroke, Herbert had to undergo the ordeal of the preceding day; only this time, they did not go through the ceremony of inviting him to breakfast, even in the paupers' ward.

He asked if there was a letter for him; there was none. He sat and brooded and wondered how they had got on at the theatre the previous night; if Clara had received his note, and why he had not heard from her, or the manager. The more he thought over the matter, the less explicable did it appear.

Previous to going to church, a strange man (evidently a person in authority) came into the ward, accompanied by one of the turnkeys who had escorted Herbert to his cell on his arrival.

"Any new arrivals?" enquired the stranger, in a somewhat abrupt and imperious tone.

"Yes," said Herbert, springing to his feet, "I believe I am the last arrival."

The man looked at him from head to foot, and then enquired of the turnkey —

"Do you know anything of this person?"

"Yes, sir," replied the fellow; "he was drunk and disorderly when he was brought in."

"A lie!" retorted Herbert, in indignant amazement.

"My good man," said the stranger, "that is not the way to speak to an officer in discharge of his duty; when you have learnt proper language, I'll listen to you."

"But I want to see someone in authority," exclaimed Herbert, as the door was slammed in his face; and the stranger, whoever he was, left the room.

Half-past ten—church again.

About that very moment, finding Clara out of danger, I enquired for poor Jack, but Mrs. Le Blanc could give me no information beyond the fact that he had been arrested, and was, she believed, in Bolingbroke Gaol.

Just then I had a message from Mr. Thompson, the manager, who was waiting to see me in the coffee-room.

The little man was sorely distressed, and explained his position with as much delicacy as possible, taking care, however, to impress upon my mind very decidedly, that as Clerehead had made the engagement, he (Thompson) would be compelled to hold him responsible for its fulfilment. I explained to him, that I should only be too happy to do all I possibly could to aid him, and that, in point of fact, I was then on my way, to arrange for Herbert's immediate release.

We walked down to the prison together.

Upon explaining our business to "Redhead," he gruffly replied that Herbert was certainly in prison, but beyond that he was incommunicative.

"Could we see him?"

"Certainly not, without a justice's order. It was not visiting day till Monday next."

"Could we see the Governor?"

"No; he was out for a drive."

We could elicit nothing more, except a few gruff monosyllables.

Thompson, who knew his way about better than I did, tried the fellow with half-a-sovereign, upon which he thawed directly, and told us the amount for which Herbert was incarcerated, and even undertook to deliver a letter to him.

By this time the debt had reached a hundred pounds.

I had not a hundred shillings about me, so we went direct to the Telegraph Office, and I wired Clerehead, to send me a cheque. In an hour's time, I got a reply from him, simply desiring me to meet him at Bolingbroke Station, on the morrow, at three o'clock.

While I was arranging for Jack's deliverance, he was being marched, once more, to the paupers' ward.

Again the same cruel farce of dinner, again his gorge—all hungered as he was—rose at the filthy fare.

He was absolutely dying of starvation, while I was within a few hundred yards of his prison, "eating of the fat and drinking of the sweet," yet absolutely debarred from coming near, or helping him, in any way. Even the very letter which I left for him had to pass through some precious red-tape ordeal, and was not permitted to be delivered until the next day, when, as will be seen, it was too late to be of service.

At this time poor Jack must have died, had not a good Samaritan, in the shape of a gigantic railway engine driver, taken compassion on him. This man had been committed for contempt of court, because he refused to pay a bill, which his stupid, thriftless wife

had run up for some shoddy stuff, with a scoundrel of a tallyman.

Dick Griffiths, as he was called, was a rough diamond, but he had a heart of gold. Fortunately, he was the only man in all the place who recognized Herbert. He was a Castletown lad, had seen Jack act repeatedly, and the honest fellow's heart bled to see him in this place.

Now Dick was just in the act of preparing his dinner, when Herbert, faint and famished, staggered back into the gentlemen-debtors' ward. There he sat with his arms folded on his chest, shivering and shrinking, but looking at Griffith's preparation with curious, but hungry eyes.

Indeed, at that moment, honest Dick was an interesting study.

On the table is a large pewter pot of stout, a couple of plates, a small wire gridiron, a new quartern loaf, a pat of butter, and a huge beefsteak.

Dick is preparing half-a-dozen large kidney potatoes, and placing them on the fire to boil. He then takes from his pocket, a small writing ruler, with which he hammers away at the steak, until he has apparently reduced it to a proper state of tenderness. This done, he salts and peppers it to his satisfaction, then down it goes in the gridiron, on the fire, and down go the plates beside it.

As he manipulates the steak, its delicious odour impermeates the whole place. The potatoes are boiling; it is really a supreme moment.

The porpoise-like parson wakes up lazily, eagerly sniffs the savoury mess, smacks his lips, and casts a lustful eye on the banquet! Dick takes the potato-pan, says pleasantly, but gravely, (under the circum-

stances one might almost have been tempted to say "gravily!")—

"Mates, I'm goin' to strain my magnum bonums, and that man as goes puttin' his nose into my pewter, or bobbin' round my cooking apparatus, him and me has got to come to cues, when I come back ; that's all."

During his absence no man ventures to go near either his pewter or his "apparatus."

He comes back quickly, places the pan on the fire, sprinkles a little salt over the potatoes, puts a coarse towel atop, to absorb the steam, gives the steak another gentle turn, and produces a knife and fork. Deftly dropping the meat on one of the plates, he puts half the butter over it, and finishes up artistically with another sprinkle of pepper and salt. Having placed the banquet on the table, he divides the huge steak into two equal parts, putting one half on one plate, and retaining the second half on the other ; then turning round to Herbert, and politely taking his cap off, he says—

"Now, then, your honour, beggin' your pardon, you and me has got to dine together to-day ; that's what we've got to do, if you ain't offended, and I ain't too bold ?

"Was there anybody a-larfin' there ? 'Cos by-and-bye I'm coming round to leave my card."

But no one was laughing ; they knew better.

The two men fell to, with an appetite. Herbert thought he had never tasted anything so delicious in his life ; so, thanks to honest Dick Griffiths, Jack did not die of starvation that day.

Eight o'clock came ; again the cell ; again the blessed balm of sleep.

CHAPTER V.

IN HADES (DAY THE THIRD).

“Can such things be?”

NEXT morning, as usual, Jack was routed out at six o'clock; this time he was introduced to a new experience.

Outside the cell stood the two warders of the first night. One of them bawled out—

“This way, 75.”

“75” followed quietly and without a word into the scullery, where one of the turnkeys peremptorily ordered him to take a bucket of water and carry it out.

“Are you mad—or am I?” demanded Herbert.

Dick Griffiths, who was being put to the same task, whispered—

“Don’t rile ’em, cap’n, or the beasts can make it hot for you. I’ll carry your bucket, and see what’s goin’ to turn up—anyhow, we shall be together, and you and me’s a match for more than half-a-dozen of these waistrels, any day in the week.”

So saying he took up the two buckets of water.

One warder strutted before, Griffiths came next; Herbert, half-dazed, followed as if in a dream, while the other turnkey brought up the rear.

In a few minutes they reached a distant corridor, where they found the poor artist and the venerable white-headed old gentleman before referred to, upon their knees scrubbing and holy-stoning the stone flags and steps of the —— !

Herbert's heart revolted at the sight, and he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

What could it all mean ? Were these men convicts ? Was he a felon ?

He was not kept long in doubt. One of his jailors said—

“ Yesterday you wanted to see ‘ someone in authority ; ’ well, here is someone in authority.”

And he indicated a great obese person, in a sort of military undress, who was seated on a high wooden stool, with his legs crossed, his arms folded, his back leaning against the corner of an office of some kind which stood exactly in the centre of the passage. The man was almost as broad as he was long ; he had the eyes and hair of an Albino, the face of an owl, an enormous head, and no neck to speak of ; his back and chest protruded in equal proportions—suggesting a gigantic caricature of our old friend Punch. His legs swayed lazily to and fro, while he affectionately nursed his folded arms, resting each elbow in the palm of the opposite hand.

This gentleman was Major Whelks, the Governor. Herbert thought he was by no means a pleasant person to look at.

Beside him, note-book and pencil in hand, stood a man in prison uniform, almost as peculiar-looking as the Governor himself. This was Jinks, his second in command, a stalwart, black scrubby-bearded six-footer,

who stood as if he had a ramrod up his back, and who had the most remarkable snub nose ever seen on human countenance.

The Albino blinked his eyes at Herbert and Griffiths, and said, in a harsh, imperious voice—

“Nos. 75 and 92, take off your coats! Do you hear? Take off your coats!”

“Take off my coat!” said Herbert. “For what?”

The Major had a peculiar habit of yelling, “What! what! what!” or “Tut! tut!”

Whenever he was “gravelled for lack of matter,” out came one or other of his favourite interjections; so he roared out—

“What! what! what! Prisoners dare talk to me! Tut! tut! Off with your coat! Do your dooty, sirrah!”

“Duty!” echoed Herbert.

“Yes, sir. Dooty, sir! dooty! What! what! what! It’s your turn, 75, and yours, 92, to do your share of the scrubbing, and brushing, and holy-stoning; so you’d better look alive about it.”

Herbert didn’t deign to reply, but he turned pale; so did Griffiths. When brave men turn pale, it is a bad look out for those who make or meddle with them.

The Governor thought they showed the white feather, so he beckoned the two turnkeys, and told them to bring out from an adjacent closet a couple of scrubbing-brushes and a couple of pieces of holy-stone. Then he said, “Now strip them.”

“No thank you,” said Griffiths; “I prefer to strip myself.”

So saying, he quietly took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and stooped to the bucket of water.

The two turnkeys now advanced to seize Herbert, but, before they could lay hands on him, a vigorous undercut from his left fist lifted the one literally off his feet and landed him on his back; and a terrific right-hander, straight from the shoulder, sent the other sprawling to the opposite end of the corridor.

As soon as they could regain their feet, and recover their senses, away they ran, bawling, "Murder! mutiny! murder!"

Meanwhile, Griffiths had not stooped to the bucket for nothing. With one dexterous movement he soused the Albino from head to foot, with another he sent the bucket flying until it cannoned on the black-bearded fellow's snout, and dropped him flat as a flounder.

The artist and the old gentleman paused in their ignoble occupation, and looked upon the conflict with eager and sympathetic interest.

The Major, shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog coming from the water, roared out his everlasting "What! what! what!" Then he blew a shrill whistle, and roared, "Mutiny! murder!"

From the other end of the corridor came a gang of warders and turnkeys; then ensued a hand-to-hand fight.

In vain did Herbert and Griffiths bowl over their opponents like ninepins; they were over-matched—ten to one. In the end, they were beaten and bludgeoned into senselessness, and flung into the Black Hole!

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTICAL JAMES.

"An ounce of common sense is worth a cartload of sentiment."

PUNCTUAL to the moment, as three o'clock struck, Clerehead arrived at Bolingbroke.

As he jumped out of the train, he exclaimed—

"Oh! there you are, Bob. Just read this; then imagine, if you can, what a healthy time I had of it till I got your telegram."

He then thrust into my hands the last edition of "The Daily Scorchers," in which I read as follows:—

"AWFUL TRAGEDY AT BOLINGBROKE.

"From our own Correspondent.

"The mystery which enshrouded the disappearance of Mr. Herbert and Miss Trevor from Claremount has at length been unravelled. At daybreak on Tuesday morning, the unfortunate lady, who was attired in the magnificent stage costume, &c., worn in the part of Beatrice on the preceding night, was found, drenched to the skin from the tempest of the preceding night, and perfectly lifeless, lying on the steps of the County Jail here.

"A richly-embroidered purse, containing upwards of three thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, was discovered near the body!

The corpse was immediately removed to the Police Station. A post-mortem examination will be held to-morrow, and the inquest will follow in due course.

"Mrs. Le Blanc, the eminent authoress, and Mr. Thompson, manager of the Theatre Royal, Claremount, arrived here at midday on Tuesday to take charge of the remains of the deceased; and Mr. Robert Penarvon, the celebrated dramatist, came down last night, by special train, to superintend the preparations for the funeral.

"The Mayor, the Mayoress, and the Rector of St. Asaphs have

called on Mrs. Le Blanc and Mr. Penarvon to offer their condolences on the melancholy occasion."

SECOND EDITION.

"Our correspondent telegraphs, that on the news of Miss Trevor's death being communicated to Mr. Herbert, who, at present, is immured in Bolingbroke Jail; the unfortunate gentleman, whose mental condition has of late occasioned his friends much anxiety, became violently insane, and has been placed under restraint in the lunatic ward of the jail infirmary."

My first feeling was one of rage. "Could I only come across 'our own correspondent,' and lay my stick across his shoulders!" I exclaimed.

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied Clerehead; "he must live. You've never been a penny-a-liner, and don't know what it is to want copy. I do, and I've a fellow-feeling for this poor d—, although he has given me fits for the past four-and-twenty hours. Simmer down, and tell me all about it."

As we walked to the White Hart I related all that had occurred, as far as I knew it myself.

"Poor Herbert!" said Clerehead, "he's always in hot water. As for being in quod, that's nothing—at least, not when you are used to it. A friend of mine used to take up his winter quarters, regularly, for years, at White Cross Street, and he was quite *désolé* when that ancient landmark was removed. As to going off his "nut," I don't think Jack Herbert is such an ass as to do that for any woman, dead or alive. Anyhow, we'll soon have him out; if we don't, it will be a bad look out for Orpheus. Of course you know La Challoner didn't act last night?"

"Good Heavens. You don't say so!"

"I do, though, worse luck. A messenger came for me to go to Morley's at five yesterday afternoon. I found her in convulsions, and that infernal paper

crushed in a lump upon the floor. I sent for Beaver, who certified she would be unable to act for a week, 'in consequence of a domestic calamity.' I thought that the neatest way to put it. Then I had to cut back to the shop to arrange for a change of programme."

"What did you fall back on?"

"Oh! 'The Masher's Début,' 'The Critic,' and 'The Fool and the Fiddler.'"

"But they have never acted 'The Critic.'"

"No, that rendered it more interesting. They were 'apt, very apt; defective in nothing but words, phrases, and grammar.'"

"They went on, and read their parts.

"It was altogether a lively exhibition. Puff held the book, and when they stuck he prompted, and when he stuck the prompter prompted him, in fact the prompter was the most prominent performer. I don't think I ever laughed so much in my life."

"Did the audience laugh?"

"No, they didn't; that was the best of the joke; they hissed! hissed as furiously as the geese who saved the Capitol. If they hadn't done so we shouldn't have known they were there, without the aid of a microscope."

"The house was not very good, then?"

"Oh! I suppose we rang up to about forty bob and finished to a 'fiver.'"

"But here we are at the hotel. First give me a glass of Madeira and a biscuit, for I'm famished, next tell me all about La Belle Trevor, and then we'll get poor Jack out of chokey."

CHAPTER VII.

"THE BLACK HOLE."

"Darkness and devils!"

THE door of "The Black Hole" was roughly thrown open, and two pitchers of water, with two hunks of brown bread, were thrust in; then the door was closed with a bang, which shook the place.

The noise recalled Griffiths to life; but Herbert remained as one dead.

Honest Dick had not the most distant idea where he was, or how long he had been unconscious. It might have been a minute, an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year, an age for aught he knew.

In reality his swoon had extended barely two hours!

His first sensation of returning consciousness was one dull throb of pain, occasioned by his aching bones.

As a rule, he invariably slept like a top. On Sunday, which was really a day of rest to him, he always slept till mid-day, and then, even when the noonday sun streamed in, he had the power to keep his eyes almost hermetically sealed. Through being endowed with this happy faculty, and having, as he used to say, eyelids tanned by the wind and the fiery breath of the engine, until they were opaque as leather, he did not at first discern the depth of the darkness which en-

visioned him. He did, however, realize that he was lying somewhere on the bare stones, and that there was a certain unaccustomed density in the air. Then he opened his eyes. Of course he could see nothing. He put his hands up before him; but the darkness did not increase, in fact it could not, it was so intensely dark already.

Ah! then it leaped through his mind at once—the struggle—the fight; he was immured in the “Black Hole!”

If he were only free; if he were only once more amongst those crowds, he would let them see!

See? See what? Great Heavens! He can’t see the hand before him.

This darkness is not the darkness of the ordinary night; it is the Egyptian darkness, which can be felt, the darkness of the everlasting stagnation of the tomb!

The poor wretch is unnerved and horror-stricken.

He had heard of the “Black Hole” at Calcutta. He had read, “It’s Never too Late to Mend!”

He had sympathized with the sufferings of poor Tom Robinson; his heart had responded with honest indignation to the eloquent and impassioned protests of the great writer.

How well he recalled when and where he had first read the story.

He had borrowed the book from the library of the Mechanics’ Institute at Castletown; had played truant and run away to a green field by the river, where he lay the whole long summer day devouring the enthralling narrative, swallowing every word of it, until night surprised him.

How hungry he was ! He had eaten nothing but a bit of bread and an apple all day.

When he got home his father gave him a hiding ; but his mother, bless her heart, brought his supper up to his bedside.

Next day the schoolmaster gave him another thrashing. Psha ! what did he care for that ? All the licking in the world couldn't beat George Fielding, and Susan Merton, Isaac Levi, John Meadows, Tom Robinson, and Jackey out of his brains.

He remembered also, that, a few weeks afterwards, the play, founded upon the book, was announced, "first time on any stage" (yes, even *before* it was acted in London !), at the Castletown Theatre !

It was produced under the superintendence of the author himself, and Tom begged or borrowed sixpence, and fought his way through the crowd with another boy, a chubby-cheeked Anglo-Russian (who has since become a popular dramatist, and a London manager !) into the "top hoyle."

So far his memory soared through time and space, but his eye could see nothing.

There is a limit, however, even to the potency of darkness, and his mind's eye now saw clearly enough, the stalwart, leonine author in the private box, to the left, of the stage.

Again, he saw poor Tom Robinson engaged in the terrific struggle with the warders, as they sought to drag him into the Hell Hole below. And now, after all these years, he was in the Black Hole himself. Yes, there he was sure enough ; there could be no doubt about that !

But where was his comrade in misfortune all this time ?

"Cap'n, Cap'n! are you there?" he asks.

All is silent; there is no answer. He hears nothing, nothing save the beating of his own heart.

The silence enhances the horror.

He tries to recollect how long poor Robinson was immured. Was it six, or twelve, or twenty-four hours, or was it forty-eight? He can't remember.

He is in an agony of pain, burning with fever, parched with thirst, and famished with hunger. Oh! for meat and drink!

As he involuntarily extends his feet they come in contact with some slight obstacle which turns over, and, as it falls, emits a hollow sound.

"What can it be?"

He leans forward and feels with outstretched hands. It is one of the pitchers of water, he has overthrown.

"Ha! what's this he feels within his grasp? Bread! Bread!

He tears it to pieces and devours it ravenously.

The pangs of hunger are partially assuaged, but he is now consumed with a raging thirst. He extends his body on the ground, face downwards. In his agony, he thrusts his parched tongue into the crevices of the stone in the futile effort to lick up some drops of the precious liquid, which is running to waste on the foul floor. At this moment, his outstretched hand comes in contact with the other pitcher. God be praised! the generous, life-giving fluid is within his grasp.

No traveller over the parched plains of Sahara could ever greet the oasis in the desert, with more gratitude, than our poor, fevered engine-driver, the discovery of that jar of water, in the darkness of his prison.

He now takes heart of grace, and tries to laugh himself out of his fears; he invokes the aid of "Old King Cole, the jolly old soul, and his fiddlers three."

It's no use—King Cole is an impostor. Neither he nor his fiddlers are of the slightest use in the present emergency, and poor Dick is more despondent than ever.

His distempered imagination now conjures up another horror—in fact, a succession of horrors.

Bolingbroke Jail has been in existence since the time of the Conquest. In ages gone by, a Royal favourite, a profligate Queen's paramour, had been done to death within these gloomy walls; a King of England had been left there to die of famine! Their bones may be lying festering and mouldering here, around him and about him. He may stumble through a death-trap, and be engulfed in some slimy, horrent abyss beneath his feet!

At this moment he sees, or thinks he sees, two rays of phosphorescent light gleaming through the darkness.

It must be remembered that, though physically brave, with the bulldog's brute courage, this man was a poor, ignorant fellow.

Many a time, when a child, he had been "put into the dark corner for being naughty;" many a time had he been terrorized by the threat of sending "Bogy" to him in night and darkness. Nay, more, his spiritual pastors and masters (dear creatures!) had taught him to believe implicitly in the material existence of "Bogy"—a great, black, grisly brute, with bristling hairs, and horns, and hoofs, and tail, with breath of flame and eyes of fire. And now the beast had come! yes, there he was opposite, with his

blazing orbs, waiting to spring upon him, and drag him down—down to the everlasting lake of fire and brimstone!

For a moment Dick's heart stood still; then his Island blood was all aflame, and the poor, demented creature roared out—

"Come if you dare, d—— you! you've got a man before you."

And he clenched his fist, and ground his teeth, and planted his back to the wall, and awaited the onslaught!

Over the darkness, and through the silence, a soft, sad voice murmured—

"Caroline, my darling, come back to me—come back!"

Then Dick cried, "Bogy be beggared; it's the cap'n himself! Cheer up, sir, cheer up! It's only Dick Griffiths. Keep up your pecker, keep up your pecker, cap'n!" and he groped his way through the darkness to where Herbert lay, in the opposite corner. Dick tried to make him speak, but the only answer he could elicit was the plaintive refrain of—

"Caroline, come back to me, my darling—come back!"

"It's his sweetheart he's goin' on about," said Dick. "Poor chap, poor chap! it's no use a-talkin to him now."

He was right, for presently Herbert ceased to speak, or even to breathe!

Then a greater fear fell upon Griffiths.

"My God!" he cried, "he's dead! And I shall die, too, if they don't come and let me out of this cursed place."

Another terror was now added to those which had already unnerved the poor engine-driver.

He would have met death face to face by daylight without flinching, but he was afraid of being alone in the darkness, with death !

At the very thought he sprang to his feet. He battered against the walls ; he tore at them with his hands, till they were bruised and bleeding ; he cried, he laughed, he shouted, he shrieked, he blasphemed. At last, in the agony of his despair, he cast himself headlong on the floor of the cell ; and with the impinge he, too, lay there senseless.

How long he remained thus he never knew ; but when consciousness returned, the haunting horror came back tenfold—he was alone, alone with darkness and death.

At this very moment, when his brain was racked, almost to bursting, he heard a loud, regular, stertorous breathing. With a wild cry, the poor fellow shrieked out, "He's alive ! thank God ! Cap'n, dear heart, cheer up ; I'm a-comin'."

Directed by the sound, he once more made his way to the spot where Herbert lay. Then he put his arms round poor Jack's neck and rested, and rocked his head upon his breast, nursing him the while like a woman, and crying like a child.

Those tears saved Dick Griffiths from madness.

Now these centuries of agony occupied barely eight hours—but such an eight hours !

At the dinner hour (half-past two) the door was thrown open, and the voice of the turnkey was heard calling out sharply—

"Now then, Nos. 75 and 92, clear out !"

Receiving no reply, he cast the light of his bull's-eye over the place, till it reached the corner where Herbert was lying all unconscious in the other's arms. When the men entered, Griffiths whispered, "Hush! hush! or you'll wake him."

Ah! there was little fear of that.

Even those hearts of stone were touched. They lifted Herbert gently and carried him forth.

Griffiths, though dazed and half blinded with the sudden light, disdained all help for himself, and followed like a lamb.

When they laid poor Jack on his pallet more dead than alive, they tried to persuade Dick to leave him, alleging there was no danger, and that they would send for the doctor.

"Send for him while I'm here then, mates," said Griffiths.

"We have sent for him," replied one of the men, "but he's out, and won't be back for an hour or two."

"Very well, then; I ain't in a hurry, and I can wait till he comes."

"But it's contrairy to discipline."

"Oh! discipline be d—d," replied Dick; "here I am, and here I stick!"

Alarmed at Herbert's condition, and finding it useless to remonstrate with Griffiths, they left him mounting guard over his friend's body, like the faithful hound in the story.

And here I pause to ask how is it that the law of the land still provides bankrupt merchants, promoters of bubble companies, and gigantic swindlers of every description with absolute immunity from arrest—nay,

more, by some occult process, permits them to retain splendid mansions, plate, pictures, carriages, horses, and the like, which should belong to their creditors, while honest, struggling men, who have the misfortune to incur some paltry, miserable, debt, are imprisoned like thieves, disciplined like felons, starved, insulted, tortured and condemned to manual labour of so degrading and so loathsome a character, that the details can scarcely be hinted at, far less described, in these pages ?

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF HADES.

“Free again, free!”

As Clerehead and I were making the best of our way to the Castle, we encountered the little manager from Claremount, and the equally little Dr. MacFarlane. I introduced them to Clerehead, and they offered to accompany us.

It soon transpired that our friend the doctor cherished an utter detestation for the Governor, to which he gave utterance at every eligible opportunity.

When we got to the jail and requested to see Herbert, “Redhead” replied, as usual—

“No prisoner can be seen without an order from the visiting justices.”

Clerehead retorted—

“Visiting justices be blanked! We don’t want those idiots’ permission to pay a debt. My friend is arrested for debt, contempt of court, whatever else you gentlemen choose to call it, and I’m here to pay the money. Mind, I tender it now. I call these gentlemen to witness it’s a legal tender. Bank of England notes. D’ye see? D’ye see?” and he flourished a handful of Bank of England notes under the fellow’s nose. “Now refuse at your peril, and I’ll bring an action for

false imprisonment. Here's my card; take it to the Governor."

After a pause of irresolution "Redhead" snatched the card, and slammed the wicket in our faces.

In a short time he returned, and without a word conducted us to the Governor's room.

The Major made no attempt at even the appearance of politeness. He opened fire with his everlasting—

"What—what—what—what do you want, good people? Be quick, for my official duties leave me no time for ceremony."

"No, nor civility either," responded Clerehead, with a delicate drawl.

"What—what—what do you mean?"

"What I say. I suppose you're the Governor of this place?"

"*Suppose* I am the Governor? *I am* the Governor, sir!"

"Very well; my friend John Herbert is in your custody, on suspicion of debt. I'm here to pay what he owes, and take him away."

"Tu—tut—tut. It's after hours. Money must be paid to proper official in the office, and in office hours, 'twixt ten and four. It's now a quarter past four, and ever my dinner's waiting."

"It will have to wait, then!"

"What—what—what! Do you know who you are speaking to?"

"I'm speaking to you, a public servant; to *my* servant, for the matter of that."

The Governor gasped and became purple with rage. Then he touched a nob in the wall, and turning round he confronted the doctor.

"Doctor Anderson," he growled, "I expect this is some of your dirty work, bringing this person here to insult me; but I'll be even with you, as sure as my name is Samuel Wheelks."

The little doctor took stock of his enemy from head to foot, and said—

"You even with me—you! Why, you—you cross between an Albino and an alligator, if you were skinned, and dried, and stuffed, I wouldn't promote you to the dignity of a doormat out-side my dispensary!"

Despite our anxiety, Clerehead and I couldn't help laughing at the little man's superb disdain and the Governor's impotent rage.

At this moment the door was thrown open, and the black-bearded fellow with the snub nose (no longer snub, but bulbous) entered. Decidedly this gentleman's appearance was by no means improved by the application of Griffiths' water bucket.

"Jinks," said Wheelks, "show these people the door, and if you've any difficulty call the men and put them out; you understand."

Jinks was either not a man of many words, or he was out of sorts from the *fracas* of the morning, so he merely made a curt military salute to his superior, and, turning to us, pointed to the door as he said—

"Now then, out you go!"

Finding no response, he strode up to Clerehead, and said, in the most insolent manner—

"Do you mean to go out quietly, or am I to chuck you out?"

"Mr. Jinks," said Clerehead, getting very pale, "if

you've any regard for your health you'll not try an experiment of that kind with me."

"Nor with me," said I; "two can play at that game."

"Three, sir—three!" interjected Thompson, swelling like a turkey cock. Then the little man said, with dignity, "Mind what you're about, my good fellow; I'm a 'chucker-out' myself!"

"As for me," said the doctor, "dare to lay a finger on me, and I'll slip my lancet into you, you son of a sore-headed kangaroo!"

Mr. Jinks concluded not to try the experiment with any of us, but retired in graceful confusion.

Then Clerehead, addressing the Governor, said—

"Look here Mr. What's-your-name, since it is evident courtesy is thrown away upon you, I'll speak to you in a language you understand. Would it surprise you to learn that I have the honour of being personally acquainted with the Home Secretary? If John Herbert isn't out of this infernal hole within the next half-hour I'll make it too hot to hold you, and your friend, Mr. Jinks, here into the bargain. I shall wait your answer for just ten minutes, and if I don't hear from you by that time, I shall do myself the pleasure of telegraphing to the Home Office."

So saying, he walked out of the room, and we followed.

In considerably less than five minutes Mr. Jinks came to us and said—

"This way, gents; you mustn't mind him. He generally gets cranky about dinner-time, 'specially if the fodder's kept waitin'."

"He's aye so," growled the doctor; "in fact, it's the normal condition of the brute!"

Jinks conducted us to the office where Herbert had undergone examination upon his arrival.

Clerehead paid the money due, and the man in charge handed over the watch and chain, cigar-case, Clerehead's cheque, &c., and the latter signed a receipt for them.

Another bell, another turnkey, who is ordered to release "No. 75." We are desired to wait a few minutes while he is getting ready.

We go out into the corridor, Clerehead passes his cigar-case round, and in a minute's time we are all four puffing away like steam engines.

Our audacity overawes the official mind, for when Jinks returns, he merely salutes and says—

"This way, gents; unfortunately, there's been a little muss this morning, a sort of free fight amongst the prisoners in the debtors' ward, and 'No. 75' has got an ugly knock or two on the head."

We are shown into the waiting-room, where we find Herbert propped up, and supported by two warders, who were not present during the *mêlée*.

Poor Jack's coat is torn to pieces, his face and head bearing marks of severe ill-usage; his eyes are fixed; he is alive, that is all, but quite unconscious, and unable to speak, walk, or even stand.

The doctor examines him carefully, shakes his head. The men are nervous and embarrassed. We demand an explanation, but can only elicit that "No. 75 has been in a little muss, that's all."

Mr. Jinks, who evidently has remembered Clerehead's advice, has made himself scarce. I am furious as a wild beast, Clerehead is little better. We demand to see the Governor; he, too, has regard for his health, and is not to be seen again.

While we are fuming, and fretting, the doctor and the manager are lifting poor Jack into the cab.

The doctor says—

“While you’re wasting your breath on yon beast of an Albino, this poor lad is dying; for God’s sake let’s get him to the Infirmary at once. It’s a case of life or death.”

And so, without another word, we proceed to the Infirmary, where Herbert is put to bed immediately.

The house physician is a young Irishman, named O’Brien. He has walked Guy’s Hospital, is a great playgoer, knows Herbert and Clara well, knows Clerehead better; in fact, knows everybody connected with the profession.

He joins the little Scotchman; they inspect Herbert together. They hold a hurried, whispered consultation; we await the result with breathless anxiety.

Anderson comes out radiant, exclaiming—

“Only concussion of the brain!”

“Only concussion of the brain?” we echo, in alarm.

“Aye, and you may thank God it’s na worse; I didn’t like to alarm ye. I thought it was a case of compound fracture, but we can guarantee that in a few days ‘Richard will be himself again.’ Eh, O’Brien?”

“I think we can,” responds his colleague.

“Thank God!” I exclaim.

“That’s all right,” says Clerehead. “Now, I’ve invariably noticed that after a funeral or a fight, the first thing Englishmen do, is to dine. Dining is an excellent institution; it’s the palladium of England’s greatness. I’ve had nothing to eat all day. We’ll leave you to put our poor friend straight, while we go

and order the grub. I shall take no refusal. At seven, gentlemen, we shall expect you."

So at seven they came to the White Hart, and, strange as it may appear, environed as we were with trouble and anxiety, we contrived to eat and drink, and Thompson, the doctors, and Clerehead were actually quite jolly over the walnuts and the wine.

After dinner the latter said—

"Since I am sure you desire to serve our unfortunate friends, I wish you would give us a certificate of their condition for publication in the London papers, and," with a sly wink, "just drop them as gently as you can. *Comprenez-vous?*"

"I think I do," responded O'Brien, with another wink.

"Oh, aye, a nod is as guid as a wink to a blind horse," chimed in the little Scotchman, and they wrote the certificates there and then.

Anderson left us to see how Clara was getting on; presently he returned, and reported, that in eight or ten days hence, she might be removed home.

Then I proposed we should accompany O'Brien to the Infirmary, to see how Jack was progressing.

Poor fellow! he was still quite unconscious, and kept continually murmuring, "Caroline, come back to me, my darling—come back!"

The business of the theatre demanded the immediate presence of Clerehead and myself, and we therefore arranged to return to town by the first train in the morning.

I felt it very hard to go away and leave the dearest friends in the world in their present condition. Both O'Brien and MacFarlane, however, assured me that

they would see their patients every hour in the day, and keep me posted in their progress—above all, if either of them got worse, they would wire me, so that, if necessary, I might be with them.

My heart was too full for words, and I scarce knew how to thank these good fellows, so I merely shook hands with them. Clerehead, however, was of a more practical turn of mind, so he gave each of them a card.

“Take this,” said he, “and whenever you come to town if you don’t call on me I shall take it as an affront. That card will admit you to the best box in the Frivolity any night in the year except on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, when the Lord Chamberlain compels us to put up our shutters; but even then, I think I may promise you a mutton chop, and a glass of claret, eh, Bob?”

“Certainly,” I answered; and so we bade them good-night, congratulating ourselves upon leaving our poor friends in such safe hands.

As we walked back to the hotel together Thompson, the manager, with some diffidence, opened fire about the breakdown at Claremount. Of course, his position was a serious one, and we both felt for him. Fortunately “Grinangag,” the great comedian of the Frivolity, was not in “Orpheus,” and Topsy Toodlems (the “Bright particular Star” of the Music Halls, who had originally been engaged for the title rôle) was on our salary list: besides which, we had half-a-dozen other people walking about doing nothing. These, with a dozen ballet, would make up a fairly efficient company to do “The Bragobras of Bagdad” and a couple of comediettas, so Clerehead generously proposed to send them for a fortnight, giving Thomp-

son their gratuitous services in compensation for Herbert's and Clara's breaking down. Thus the matter was settled to the poor manager's satisfaction, and he returned to Claremount with a lighter heart than when he left it.

I may here mention that the "Bragobras" recouped him for the loss he had sustained, besides which, he brought an action for libel against "The Scorchers," and gained swinging damages, so that on the whole he did not do so badly by this unfortunate business.

The last thing before going to bed, I went to bid Mrs. Le Blanc "good-bye," and to ask how Clara was getting on.

"Beautiful," she said. "Since you are going away, if you are a good boy, you may have just one little peep."

There lay my darling, pale as marble, and to all appearance, almost as motionless. Her hands, whiter than her sheets, lay folded on her bosom. She looked like one of those white angels, I have seen reclining on a tomb of Chantrey's, somewhere in the Abbey.

As I gazed, an awe fell upon me.

"M-may I?" I falteringly enquired.

"I'm not looking," said Mrs. Le Blanc.

I lifted the dear little hand to my lips and kissed it reverently. Then, turning to Mrs. Le Blanc, I took both her hands and kissed them also.

"You are my only friend," I said; "to your care I confide her. You will let me know, day by day, how she progresses, and if things should take a bad turn, you will not keep it from me—promise me that."

"I promise," she said, and so we parted.

As I left the room I encountered Clerehead in the lobby. He gave me a glum look, and said—

“Soho! my friend, you may steal the horse, but I am not to look over the hedge. I came two hundred miles merely to ascertain whether she was dead or alive, and that old catamaran won’t let me come within a mile of her. I’m not pious enough, I suppose. Never mind! the stake is not lost, till it’s won, and we shall see—what we shall see.”

“We shall,” I replied.

Then we lighted our candles, and sought our rooms in silence.

CHAPTER IX.

LAUDATE !

AT eight in the morning we were on our way to town together.

Clerehead was in his most cynical and least agreeable mood, or perhaps I was. Instead of his perpetual cigarettes he smoked huge Havannahs all the way—a sure sign that he was out of sorts. I smoked my pipe in silence.

He bought all the magazines and papers, daily and weekly, he could lay his hands on, skimmed them through with great rapidity, then littered the seats with them in every direction.

“Look here, Bob,” he burst out at last, “I know what you are thinking about as well as if I were inside your skin. ‘Now lay thy finger thus, and let thy discreet soul be instructed.’ They’ll both get better, that’s safe as houses ; but I was down in Harrogate with them for a fortnight, and Jack Herbert will no more marry Clara Trevor than I shall marry Julia Pastrana. He and Caroline Challoner are made for each other. If she doesn’t have him she’ll ‘live and die a spinster, and pay the tax,’ and if he doesn’t have her he’ll die a bachelor. So cheer up, there’s a chance for you or me.”

“For you ?” I exclaimed. “But I loved her the first moment I saw her.”

"So did I," he replied; "only you had the first chance, and didn't make the most of it. Now, it's no use getting waxy, or playing dog in the manger. Confound it all! If she won't have you, who knows, but I may stand a chance? Anyhow, when she gets better I shall try my luck—so shake hands upon it, and may the best man win."

"It is early times to talk about that," said I, "but let it be as you wish."

At length we got to town. As we drove from the station he said—

"What the deuce are we to do about La Chaloner?"

"How can I tell until I've seen her?"

"That's true," said he; "so we'd better drive to Morley's at once."

When we were ushered into her room, Caroline sprang up and approached us eagerly.

The anxiety of the past two or three days had told upon her. There were two deep blue hollows beneath her eyes, which appeared preternaturally large; her long hair streamed down her shoulders and over the loose purple robe which flowed from head to heel, without cincture, girdle, or restraint of any kind.

"Well—well—well! Speak, or I shall go mad!" she exclaimed.

"Be composed," said Clerehead; "the whole thing is a shameful *canard*. The simple fact is, he was arrested for debt."

"He is in prison, then?"

"He was; but do you think it likely we should be here, if he were still there?"

"You are very good, sir," she replied.

"Mr. Penarvon," she continued, "you were his friend. Tell me all ; I can bear it."

"He is slightly indisposed—caught cold upon the journey, and we have left him under the charge of Doctor O'Brien."

"An intimate personal friend of mine," interjected Clerehead, eagerly. "See, here is the medical certificate."

When she had read it, I think she would have fallen to the ground, had we not caught her in our arms, and supported her to a chair.

She sat cowering over the fire in silence for a few moments ; then springing to her feet, and ringing the bell, enquired—

"May I offer you some tea ?"

When we had taken tea, she rose, and said—

"You must excuse me, but it is time to go to the theatre, and I—"

She tottered towards the door, but Clerehead took her firmly, yet gently, by the wrist, and leading her back to her seat, said—

"Miss Challoner, you're not going to the Theatre to-night ; and you shan't go at all if you don't do what I tell you !

"To-morrow morning, at twelve, I shall come for you with my daughter Milly. You wouldn't think it, but I've a daughter, nearly as old as you are ; she lives with my sister, who has a little cottage down at Norwood ; and she's a highly respectable old woman, though, perhaps, you wouldn't think that, either. I shall drive you down in my trap, and Milly and Penarvon shall talk to you all the way. When you are settled you will go with Milly to the Crystal Palace

daily—she knows every inch of it. Penarvon 'shall come and see you every other day, and when he doesn't come, I will; and what's more, I'll teach you to play whist! If that doesn't cure you and make you say once more—

'My soul's in arms, and eager for the play,'

why, then James Clerehead knows nothing of human nature! Not another word—now mind, twelve to-morrow," and having conjured up the shadow of a smile on her face, he turned to quit the room; then he stopped abruptly, and said—

"Bob, never mind the theatre—the poor child is lonely; you'd better stay awhile and talk with her about old times."

The situation was awkward for us both—we were continually treading upon delicate ground.

She was under the impression that she had been wronged, but her great love leaped forth like fire whenever I mentioned Jack's name; yet there was great difficulty in avoiding all mention of the "other one"—besides, her woman's instinct had long since told her that I adored her rival.

We had, however, many subjects of common interest; and time passed so quickly that when ten o'clock came we were both surprised. She pressed me to take supper, and promised, if I would do so, that she would join me, and she actually drank a glass of claret, and ate the first mouthful of solid food she had tasted for days.

At length the clock struck eleven, and I rose to take my departure. Then she croodled up to me, and said—

"Mr. Penarvon, do you think He'll soon get better?"

"Yes, I do." I replied.

"But are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Thank you; you were his friend—his only one. He always called you Robert; may I call you so?"

"I shall feel flattered and honoured, Miss Challoner."

"Call me Carry," she said; "He always did."

"Well, Carry," I said.

"That's right; I'm so lonely. I haven't a friend in the world except Him and—you."

"You forget Mr. Clerehead," I said.

"Yes, oh! yes, Mr. Clerehead. He's very good and kind; but he's a holiday friend, while he and you were comrades, you know; but you—you love—*Her*?"

"Dearer than life."

Then after a pause she enquired in tremulous tones—

"Do you think *He* does?"

"He esteems and honours her, but he loves you, and you only."

The hot blood mounted over her brow. She was radiant with happiness.

"God bless you," she said, "you have made me so happy. I shall get better soon; I am better already. Good-night."

As I passed down the corridor I heard her singing the "Laudate" of Zingarelli.

I paused and listened to the glorious melody. It seemed as if a hundred linnets imprisoned in her throat, were leaping forth to get free, and greet the sunrise, as the jubilant words—

"*Laudate pueri nomen Domine*"

arose to Heaven.

CHAPTER X.

DOCTOR CLEREHEAD.

“ Pluck from the memory, a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain.”

CLEREHEAD had diagnosed Caroline's malady accurately, and his treatment was entirely successful.

The little cottage at Norwood turned out to be an elegant villa residence, situated in its own grounds, his sister a very charming and accomplished widow of forty, and his daughter was (and is, bless her heart!) an angel.

Caroline was yearning for sympathy, and though she kept the great grief of her life to herself, it was something inexpressibly pleasant to have the companionship of this young, fresh, and ingenuous mind.

Both girls had the same tastes. They loved poetry and music, flowers and pictures, and they did not disdain needlework; they read the same books, they sang, they played, they even danced together.

It was difficult to realize that so innocent a child as Milly could be the daughter of this *blasé* man of the world.

When I first saw her I couldn't help expressing my astonishment at their relationship, whereupon Clerehead flared up and said—

"Is there anything astounding in my having a daughter?"

"No," I replied, "there is certainly nothing astonishing in your having a daughter, or half-a-dozen daughters; but such a daughter as this! 'Who from such a stem would look for such a shoot?'"

"You are complimentary," he growled; "but ah, you didn't know her mother," and he left the room abruptly.

Presently, however, I saw him smoking his cigarette on the terrace outside.

In half an hour's time he returned, and began to try to initiate his patient into the mysteries of his pet abomination, "whist."

During this short holiday, we had a musical evening entirely to ourselves. Caroline had asked me to bring down her violin, so we made a fair quartette. She led with the fiddle, Milly played the piano, I followed with the flute, and Clerehead—yes, even Clerehead, had his soft place—he played on the violoncello, and played it well, too.

I think we all forgot our troubles that pleasant Saturday evening.

Next day we took a walk with the girls after church time, and Clerehead said—

"Now, Miss Challoner, you're something like yourself, and you must be in harness by Tuesday, so you had better get back to town to-morrow morning."

"Papa," said Milly, "may I go up and see Carry act?"

"My darling," he replied, gravely, "you may go up, and you may come down, but you can't see Miss

Challoner act at present. Wait till she plays Juliet, and then you shall have a box, all to yourself.

"Seriously, my pet, you may come and stay with Miss Challoner any day in the week from twelve to four, that is, if she'll have you. Yes, any day except Tuesday next, when I'm sure she doesn't want to be bothered, and Saturday and Sunday, when she has whispered to me that she wants to come here, that is to say, she wants to come down every Saturday night and stay till Monday morning. That's about it, isn't it, Miss Challoner?"

Caroline assented with a smile.

We returned to town on Monday, in time for a twelve o'clock rehearsal, so as to make sure that all was smooth for the following night.

Caroline had few acquaintances, and certainly no friends, among the female members of the company, and the "beggarly account of empty benches" which ensued on her withdrawal from the theatre, didn't enhance their regard for the "provincial actress."

She, however, returned their aversion with placid indifference, and passed them by as if unaware of their very existence, but when she stepped on the stage, the entire orchestra rose, and applauded her like one man. Then she collapsed into tears. A little kindness easily touched that proud heart.

Clerehead was the best "showman" in the world (except *one*, whom I prefer not to particularize!), and he had availed himself of every trick of that not very dignified calling to direct attention to Caroline's reappearance. The result was a densely crowded house, a most enthusiastic audience, and all the outward and visible signs of success.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BIRD HAS FLOWN.

“Lost evermore to me!”

EVERY day's post brought us more satisfactory reports from MacFarlane and O'Brien as to the condition of their patients, so leaving Caroline to her triumphs, Clerehead and I (for he persisted in accompanying me) went down to Bolingbroke, in obedience to the behest of Mrs. Le Blanc, to bring Clara home.

Three weeks had elapsed since our last visit, and we were surprised and delighted to find her better even than we had dared to anticipate.

She was dressed in a white peignoir trimmed with a delicate green, her beautiful hair flowing down one mass of curls, her face very pale, her eyes preternaturally bright. Heaps of flowers were around her, and about her, and she was half sitting, half reclining in an invalid's chair. In her hand was an open volume of “*In Memoriam*.” I had time to notice these four lines, marked at the side with a pencil—

“I own this true, whate'er befall,
I feel it when I sorrow most,
’Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all!”

She must have seen that I saw the passage, for she coloured vividly, and rapidly closed the book, as she

murmured half remorsefully, yet in scarcely audible tones—

“How good you are to forgive me!”

With that she timidly extended her hand, but I made no sign to take it.

Here was I dying to pour forth my heart at her feet, and yet I stood as one stricken dumb.

After a moment's pause of mutual embarrassment, she turned from me to Clerehead, and extended both her hands to him, exclaiming—

“Ah, Mr. Clerehead, I'm so glad to see you.”

He stooped down and kissed them with effusive ardour.

I felt as if I could have killed him on the spot!

“How kind of you to send this wonderful chair, and the fruit and flowers, above all, the books; I adore poetry. But really you do everything *en monseigneur*. I'm sure I don't know what we should have done without you.”

He murmured something in reply which I did not hear; then he said somewhat banteringly—

“Well, Sir Knight of the rueful countenance, don't you think we'd better see about dinner?”

“As you please,” I replied, moodily, taking up the “Times,” and throwing myself in a chair facing the window, but with my back placed towards them.

“Well, then, it pleases me to go and look up that hamper I brought from Fortnam and Mason's, and to consult the cook about the grouse.” And so he left us.

Although I sat with my back to Clara, the window before me was of plate-glass, and reflected some strange optical illusions, or delusions.

I was not reading the paper any more than I am

reading it now. Before me, in the window, I saw reflected the fire, and the couch on which reclined a fair woman in white. I saw the table with the fruit and the flowers. I noted with eager interest, that, the moment he quitted the room, she sprang up, looked to see if she was observed, then rapidly walked over to another table, on which lay a large Greek urn or basin, filled with water-lilies, floating in their native element. She dipped her dainty embroidered kerchief in the water, and commenced scrubbing the backs of her beautiful hands, just where he, a moment before, had left the imprint of his lips. She was as earnest in the operation as she used to be in Lady Macbeth, when she was endeavouring to obliterate "the damned spot."

When she returned to the couch I arose, and went over to her, intending to speak. She looked at me enquiringly, I thought superciliously; and—confound the fellow—at this moment Clerehead returned, accompanied by Mrs. Le Blanc. He was radiant with good-humour, and made himself infernally agreeable. I consoled myself a little by thinking that perhaps he wouldn't have been quite so radiant, if he had perceived the little pantomimic performance which had taken place a minute ago.

We had taken the precaution to strictly impress on our kind friends the doctors, not to let either Mrs. Le Blanc or Clara know anything about Herbert's latest misfortunes. Therefore, as soon as I could get the chance of speaking to Mrs. Le Blanc alone, I begged her to tell me, exactly, what she had told Clara about Herbert. She informed me briefly, that she had told her all she knew—which was, in point of fact, that he had been released from prison.

A fortnight ago Clara had enquired, abruptly—

“Is he still in Bolingbroke?”

“I believe so,” the other replied.

“And he has never been to see me—to enquire for me?”

“Never!”

For two or three days after that Clara sat brooding, silent, and melancholy; then came the invalid chair, the fruit and flowers from London, and the books. She buried herself in “*In Memoriam*.” Presently she began to thaw, and then—“But you can see for yourself, Robert.”

We hoped to find Herbert fit for removal to Norwood, as an agreeable surprise for Caroline, on the following Sunday; so while dinner was preparing, we strolled down to the Infirmary.

We met O’Brien at the very gate.

“What have you done with Herbert?” he enquired.

“What have *we* done with Herbert? What do you mean?” we both exclaimed.

“Mean?” replied O’Brien, “why I told him this morning, you were both coming down by the express, and he went to the station to meet you.”

“Good God!” I exclaimed, “is this coil never to end? We’ve not even seen him. Come with us down to the station at once, and let us enquire what has become of him.”

To our horror, we ascertained that he had actually left Bolingbroke by the very train by which we arrived!

He had booked to Glasgow—that much was certain, for the booking clerk not only knew him, but as he had no money, he had been obliged to leave his gold watch-guard (which was of considerable value) in pawn;

and the young man had not only advanced his fare, but had lent him a pound besides, on the same security.

How was this mystery to be explained?

My course was clear; I did not hesitate a moment. My duty was to follow him. We had an early dinner, then Clerehead, Mrs. Le Blanc, and Clara went to town, by the express that left at five. When the guard had locked the door, and she saw me remaining alone on the platform, Clara enquired, I thought somewhat wistfully—

“Do you not accompany us then?”

“No,” I replied, curtly.

She seemed vexed; anyhow, she looked at me reproachfully, and her eyes were fixed on mine to the last, while the train moved slowly away, leaving me standing there alone.

The mail for Scotland did not leave till eleven. Oh! the weary, weary waiting of those six mortal hours! Every fugitive wind of Heaven blew in every direction, through every hole and corner of that miserable station. The place represented the very abomination of desolation. I walked up and down the platform, until I had learnt by heart every poster and advertisement. I went into the waiting-room—no fire, of course! there never is one, in these places. I found the good old book lying on a table, alighted by accident on the story of Esau and Jacob, read it, cast it down with anger, exclaiming, “What a dastardly skunk that Jacob must have been!” dashed out impatiently into the rain, and walked on till I found myself, by merest accident, before the Infirmary. Then it struck me that I’d look up the doctor, and see if I could obtain any further information about Jack.

O'Brien was heartily glad to see me. "Sure it's a comfort," said he, "to see a Christian in this God-forgotten hole. Come along, and I'll give you a tumbler of poteen that'll warm the cockles of your heart."

Over a pipe and a glass of punch, he informed me that Dick Griffiths, having served his time for contempt of Court, had called only the day previous, to enquire how Herbert was getting on.

The scene between Jack and his humble friend was very touching. When it was over, as Dick was about to leave the Infirmary, O'Brien called him in, set his tongue going with a glass of whiskey and water, and elicited from him a full, true, and particular account of the fight in the prison, and other matters with which the reader is already acquainted.

When Dick had done his thirty days, he turned round to Jinks, and said—

"I'm goin' to see how the cap'n's gettin' on. If he's gone to Kingdom Come—and he was on the way there—you can tell old Whelks, with my compliments, when he and the rest of you murderin' thieves are brought up for manslaughter, I shall be there to give my evidence. So put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Jinks."

With this parting shot, he came to see Herbert. After his interview with O'Brien he went home, and incontinently gave his wife a hiding, like a bold British husband. To be sure, that cost nothing but a stirrup strap, in which he had invested for the purpose; and, to his simple mind, it seemed a proper law of compensation as far as it went. But it didn't go quite as far as he wanted it to go; so, as it happened to be the day usually set apart for the tallyman's weekly visit, he

waited for him, and let him have the stirrup strap, hot.

Ultimately, Dick had to pay forty shillings for the luxury ; but he was quite content, for, as he said, " he had had his money's worth."

As for Mrs. Griffiths, she concluded not to truck with that tallyman any more, and he very sagaciously concluded to steer clear of Dick's diggings during his next journey ; and here honest Dick disappears altogether from this narrative.

The doctor told me, the wonder was that poor Jack was not killed. He had patched him up as well as he could, but he certainly would never be the same man again. O'Brien suspected at first, but now he was sure, Herbert had a " kink " in his brain ; and that was why he had made this precipitate retreat to avoid his old friends.

It was now getting near the time of my departure, so O'Brien offered to see me off. On our way to the railway I called in at the police-station to thank Macdonald and his bonny little wife, for all their care and kindness to Clara. The honest fellow gave me my darling's purse, containing her three hundred pound notes, and some five or six sovereigns, but declined any compensation for his men ; it was enough for him, he said, that he had once seen Clara play Rosalind, but he would be very glad if I could do anything to help Cassidy, the Irish sailor, as the poor fellow was in sore distress. I bequeathed the honest Irishman the loose sovereigns, and bore in mind Macdonald's recommendation. (*En parenthèse*, Mick Cassidy is now the bright, active messenger, you may see any day in the week at the Frivolity, and his wife is engaged in the wardrobe.)

Just before the train started, O'Brien enquired—

"Is this card which Mr. Clerehead gave me for only one, or for any night?"

"For every night," I replied, "while I am in the theatre."

"I'm glad of that," he said, "for I'm going to 'turn up' this penal servitude, and get back to the 'little village' as soon as I can, so I anticipate many pleasant evenings."

The train began to move, but he moved with it to the end of the platform, as he said—

"Good-bye—good luck to you, Mr. Penarvon. The 'pleasantest evening' I'll have in this pig-sty-of-a-place will be the night before I go away, when I'll call at 'The Hare and Hounds' and give that infernal Albino the finest bating he ever had in his life, or my name's not Patrick O'Brien."*

Next morning I was in Glasgow. I went straight to Herbert's old theatre; but no one had seen or heard anything of him there. I went to theatre after theatre; enquired in every direction, but no one knew anything of my unhappy friend. 'Twas evident I had made a bootless journey.

Previous to returning to town, I left instructions with everyone I knew, to communicate with me the moment he was seen or heard of.

When I got back, Clerehead told me that Clara had reached home safely, and, though tired, was not much the worse for her fatigue.

"Now," said he, "the next thing to do, is to break the news about Herbert to La Challoner. The sooner

* I am delighted to say that my friend Pat was enabled to keep his word before he left Bolingbroke.

she knows the better, for nothing is so bad as suspense. *I don't shirk the job; but you've known her longer than I have—she will bear it better from you. Go down with her to-night to Norwood; to-morrow, being Sunday, she'll have all the day to get over it.*"

God knows my own troubles were hard enough to bear; but of course I went down to Norwood, and, after supper, I got Mrs. Elton and Milly to leave me alone with Caroline. Then I told her as well as I could the bitter truth.

That she suffered much was plain, but she bore it bravely.

After a pause, she asked—

"Did He go away—alone?"

"Quite alone," I said.

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"Please don't tell these women here. I don't mind your knowing, Robert, because we both love him; but I don't want strangers to participate in a confidence so sacred. You know, of course, that Mr. Clerehead gives me a large salary, more, I think, than I deserve. I want something put in 'The Times'—see, something like this—"

She sat down and rapidly wrote the following advertisement:—

"If John Herbert, Esq., late manager of the Great Northern Circuit, will communicate with his friends, he will hear of something greatly to his advantage.

"As it is possible Mr. Herbert may have been taken ill during his recent journey to Scotland, £100 reward

will be paid to anyone forwarding his authentic address to

“ ROBERT PENARVON,
“ Frivolity Theatre, London.”

“ I haven’t asked if I may use your name,” she said.

“ You knew, of course, that it was needless to do so.”

“ You will have that inserted every day until we find him ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Thank you. You have always been his friend, henceforth you are my brother ! ”

And so I was from that time forth.

END OF BOOK THE FIFTH.

BOOK THE SIXTH.

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CHAPTER I.

DRIFTING AWAY.

"Of all afflictions taught a lover yet,
'Tis sure the hardest to forget."

WEEKS and months have passed away.

Clara has gradually recovered her health, but her mind seems sorely unhinged by the recent events, or perhaps I only think so. One thing, however, is quite certain—she is strangely changed in her demeanour to me. There is an inexplicable shadow cast between us, which estranges us daily more and more.

It is no longer "Bob" or "Robert;" it is always "Mr. Penarvon" now. Instead of coming forward to meet me with the old, cordial welcome, she is reserved and distant—perhaps I am a little so myself. I begin to think that this frequently arises from Clerehead's presence, for I am no longer the only invited guest. He is always at Florence Villa on Sunday; always alert, and agreeable even to Mrs. Le Blanc. Formerly I was welcome at all times—at all times spoiled, and petted, by both ladies.

Though only a few years older than myself, had Mrs. Le Blanc been my mother and I her only son, she could not have been more thoughtful and affectionate.

It is Clara only who is changed.

Formerly, when we went to the theatre, I used to bring a couple of modest bouquets from Covent Garden at a shilling each, and she would prepare a *boutonnière*, and purr round me, and pin it in my coat, and smile and look up in my eyes when she had done!

Alas! how changed it all is.

Now, if there is a picture to be seen, a concert to be given, a *première* to take place, Clerehead has facilities, which I do not possess, for securing the best seats, the best boxes. For her sake he even accepts Mrs. Le Blanc as her *chaperone*, though he dislikes her, quite as much as she distrusts him.

Punctual to the moment he turns up at Florence Villa, always armed with the choicest bouquets the Floral Hall can provide. When the performance is over, he deposits the ladies at the door of the villa.

Many a time have I waited for her return, in the rain and snow, till night changed to morning. Amidst my misery, how grateful I felt that they never once asked him in—that would have made my cup of bitterness to overflow.

One evening, at about eight o'clock, I called to bring Mrs. Le Blanc half-a-dozen excerpts I had made for her at the Museum, for some book she was writing.

Clerehead's brougham was waiting at the open door. Passing by the drawing-room, I heard the two voices I knew so well, mingling in low, pleasant laughter. I saw them standing before the fire—he was in the act of handing her a magnificent bouquet; she was expressing her admiration.

“And now give me one little flower for a *boutonnière*,” he said.

"Choose for yourself," she replied.

"I could have done that before, but I want to know, to feel sure, that your fingers have touched the flowers."

She looked him straight in the eyes; he encountered her gaze without flinching. Pausing for a moment, she lifted the bouquet between her finger and thumb, as if it had been a toad, or some other loathsome thing, and made a movement, as if about to throw it in the fire; then, shrugging her beautiful shoulders, she said, with a laugh—

"Of course the king is welcome to his own again."

With that, she plucked forth a flower, and placed it in his button-hole.

"There, Monseigneur!" she said. "I really don't think you could have been better served in the Floral Hall itself."

For answer he stooped and kissed her gloved hand, and wrapped her opera cloak around her; then they moved to the other end of the room.

At this moment, Mrs. Le Blanc, coming rapidly downstairs, dressed for the theatre, encountered me face to face in the hall.

"Robert!" whispered she, in alarm. "What's the matter? Are you ill?"

Placing my finger on my lip in sign of silence, without one word, I glided stealthily and swiftly from the house, glad to escape further torture.

Truly "the jealous are the damned."

How I watched and waited for their return. It was an awful night. But what were storm and tempest to me? Like the poor discrowned king—

"The tempest in my mind
Did from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beat there."

At length, at nearly one in the morning, I heard the clattering of horses' feet, the rumbling of wheels.

His brougham is at the door, he alights, hands out the ladies, lifts his hat ceremoniously, the door is closed, almost in his face; with a fierce gesture of impatience, he shrugs his shoulders, pauses a moment, leaps into the carriage, and is driven rapidly away.

The rain has ceased, the moon is shining brightly; drenched as I am from head to foot, I wait and wait until I see the light in her chamber.

Usually she looks out into the park the last thing.

Will she do so to-night?

At last! She stands in the moonlight, looking ineffably sad, and yet supremely beautiful; she sighs and closes the curtains.

It is time to be going homeward. I walk towards town, and take the first cab I encounter.

God is good to me, and lets me sleep sometimes—else, months of these bitter experiences must have killed me.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUKE.

“ A man ! I'll swear a man ! ”

THE “ Orpheus fever ” has set in.

Business at the Frivolity is enormous ; indeed, unprecedented. A seat is not to be had, for love or money, for months to come. Traffic is interrupted nightly by the crowds who struggle to obtain admittance.

Caroline's photographs are in every shop window. They are at a premium. You may buy a large cabinet of the P—— or the P——ss for a shilling each. Caroline's cannot be had for less than two. True, there is a cheaper mode of obtaining the “ counterfeit presentment ” of the fashionable beauty.

Certain society journals produce exquisitely tinted lithographs, full-length autotypes, and Heaven knows what, at popular prices. The illustrated weeklies and magazines follow suit, and the fever has even spread to the other side of the Atlantic.

Van Vort has published the Orpheus Waltz and the Orpheus Quadrilles, dedicated by permission to Miss Caroline Challoner, whose portrait appears in glowing colours on the frontispiece.

The Orpheus cuffs, the Orpheus collars, the Orpheus

gloves, the Orpheus hat, the Orpheus necktie; nay, even the Orpheus walking-stick have become the rage, and are flaunted before us in the Row, the opera, everywhere.

Fashionable painters and sculptors implore, in vain, for the honour of a sitting. Society journals teem with on-dits. She is the comet of the season. The stage-door is mobbed nightly by the Crutch and Tooth-pick Brigade, anxious to get a sight of their divinity. The noble army of Mashers declare on to Clerehead begging the honour of an introduction. He replies to them all, with imperturbable good humour—

“No, dear boys, try it somewhere else; she’s not one of that sort. We get on capitally as it is, but she has a temper of her own, and I hate rows.”

One young fellow, with whom I had become somewhat intimately acquainted, the young Duke of Frogmore, used to come to my rooms, continually worrying me to give him an introduction.

It was in vain that I told him she was “engaged;” he returned to the charge, morning, noon, and night.

“But look here, don’t you know,” said he, “what does it signify about being ‘engaged’ if she isn’t spliced? Besides, dash it all! only give a fellow a chance; I can play a waiting game, and who knows but I might carry off the stakes? Because, look here, don’t yer know, a two-year-old ain’t the same form as a filly, and she might take it into her head to change her mind.”

Then he tried another tack. He knew my mania for the poetic drama, and he suggested that I should take a theatre; he would find the capital and engage Caroline for the leading parts.

"Look here, don't yer know!" said he, "I can manage a theatre cheaper than any fella in England."

"The deuce you can!" I exclaimed. "How do you mean to set about it?"

"Oh! easily. Look here, don't yer know? Last year I made a hole in nearly seventy thousand quid. At Ascot I dropped thirty thou; at Doncaster twenty: cards over ten: and the yacht stood me in about ten more. Now, I shall shunt the lot—turf, cards, yacht, and the whole bag of tricks. Suppose the theatre cost me fifty thou a year, you see I'm twenty thou to the good by the transaction. Theatres are a fine game if you know how to manage 'em. Why Pelter dropped more money at the Derby last year in five minutes, than in all the seven years he ran the Elysian, where he had private boxes and stalls galore for his pals for nothing. And then Kilgobbin bought the 'Montpelier' and the 'Flora,' one of them for twelve thou and the other for fourteen, and lets 'em for four thou a year each! That's good business, ain't it? Talk about the 'peoples,' why they ain't in it with my noble friend; he knows his way about, I can tell you. Do, let me take a theatre, old chap, or dash me if I don't build one, and make her fortune and yours and my own into the bargain."

To all his entreaties I turned a deaf ear; for I liked the boy, and would not lead him into a fool's paradise, but accident befriended him, despite my endeavours, and this was how it came about.

During Caroline's stay at Morley's, the suite of rooms immediately adjacent to hers was occupied by the *Princesse Neruda*, popularly known as "*La Belle Russe*." This distinguished personage was a lady of

great beauty and accomplishments, banished, it was alleged by her friends, from Holy Russia on account of Nihilistic proclivities; other people, possibly better informed, though less good-natured, asserted that she was in the secret service, and more especially in the confidence and private pay of Prince Gortchakow.

Harry Laburnum, Member for Shooborough, and proprietor of the "Crucifier," asserted, with cold-blooded and characteristic candour, "that she was better known than respected in every capital in Europe; that she had been banished from St. Petersburg; that she had married young and often; that her first husband was chief mourner at the funeral of her third and fourth; that, besides half-a-dozen husbands, she had had as many lovers as the woman in the Arabian Nights; that she had been mixed up in that little affair of the Grand Duke's with the diamonds; that she was accustomed to dance the Can-can after her *petit soupers* in the Champs Elysées; and that, in consequence of throwing her shoe on one of these festive occasions at the head of a certain illustrious personage, she had been 'invited' to leave Paris at a moment's notice."

This and much more, she read in the "Crucifier," and writhed as she read. Then she resolved to beard the lion in his den; so she drove down to Elizabeth's Gate, to have it out with the gentle Laburnum. He received her with his usual cynical urbanity; she was furious, and talked of proceedings. He smiled benignantly, and referred her to George Lewis; then offered her a cigarette of the choicest Latakia, and a cup of Russian tea with a lemon squeezed in it; asked her opinion about his copy of Titian's Venus and his

Messonnier; what she thought of Turgéniev's last book, &c.

She was a sagacious woman, and saw it was better to accept the inevitable; so they passed a very pleasant hour or two together, "slating" their friends, and comparing their experiences, which were varied and peculiar. They parted mutually impressed. She concluded not to go to Ely Place; and Harry, who was not a bad sort in his way, dropped her for the future.

Now, during Caroline's illness, Madame la Princesse sent her fruit and flowers daily, and as soon as she was convalescent, did herself the honour of waiting upon the interesting invalid. This friendly intimacy was sedulously cultivated; and when, a short time after, "La Belle Russe" took a large mansion, splendidly furnished, in the Regent's Park, to enable her to carry out her views connected with the game of baccarat, &c., she thought La Belle Challoner would be an agreeable and attractive ornament for the family circle. Hence, when she inaugurated the campaign with a house warming, she invited Caroline and myself to help her do the honours.

At that time we were both in ignorance of the article in the "Crucifier," and of the lady's antecedents, so, in the innocence of our hearts, we accepted the invitation.

Upon our arrival we were ushered into the drawing-room, where we found upwards of a score of well-known men about town—all more or less distinguished in gaming, sporting, and other less savoury circles—our hostess, and two women who lived very much on the outskirts of Bohemia—women, in fact, about whom there could be no manner of mistake.

They were all laughing and talking as we entered, and then an awkward silence occurred. The men bowed profoundly as the Princesse advanced, all gush and grimace, to meet us. But "La Belle Russe" had reckoned without her guest. At the first glance Caroline divined the situation. Her self-possession was admirable. Dexterously avoiding contact, or even recognition, of Madame and her lady friends, she included all the men in the room in one stately, sweeping courtesy, as she murmured with disdainful politeness—

"There has evidently been a slight mistake here. Mr. Penarvon, will you be kind enough to take me to my carriage?"

Without a word I led her to the door. On arriving there, to our horror we found that our conveyance had gone, and it was raining in torrents!

At this moment up drove Frogmore's brougham, and out jumped the Duke, face to face with Caroline and myself!

There was no help for it now; we were stranded in the wilds of Regent's Park in evening dress—a bitter winter's night, too. I explained the dilemma in which we were placed as briefly as I could, and introduced him to Caroline. He immediately offered his trap, and we were only too glad to accept it, to enable us to get home.

When he called upon me next day, to accompany him to pay his devoirs to Caroline (for he wasn't the man to let the grass grow under his feet) he told me that La Belle Russe had not appeared to enjoy her dinner particularly; that she flavoured each succeeding course with a sauce piquante, compounded of ornaments

from every living language ; that, after dinner, the coffee, or something else, did not agree with her ; and that she had not her usual good fortune at baccarat.

It is needless to say that after this experience the ladies of the *demi-monde* let Caroline "severely alone."

"'Tis an ill wind, however, that blows no one any good ;" and the Duke was indebted to La Belle Russe, for an introduction to the object of his adoration.

CHAPTER III.

WESTWARD HO!

"To the West—to the West—love, with me."

AT length the run of "Orpheus" came to an end, not because its attraction had fallen off, but because Clerehead, to his great regret, had made previous arrangements with some of those "confounded foreigners," as he called them.

In anticipation of the termination of Caroline's engagement, he had been "working the States," and all kinds of proposals came from America.

He replied, *sans cérémonie*, "All this sort of thing looks very well on paper, but it's of no use without a banker's reference."

At last one day a tall, smart, keen-eyed American, with a face like a young Greek, very quick, very quiet, and very self-possessed, lounged into the managerial den one morning with a cigar in his mouth.

After a few minutes' talk they strolled together down to the American Exchange, then over to Coutts'; and in less than an hour the American tour was settled on terms which I hesitate to repeat, lest they may appear fabulous.

In a month's time Caroline had to sail.

The interval was devoted to preparations. She went

over to Paris, taking with her Mrs. Elton and Milly to assist her in the choice of dresses and other feminine frivolities.

On her return she urged me to go with her to the States.

I couldn't.

What was the use of my body going to America, while my soul remained in England ?

Then she asked Clerehead to let Milly accompany her ; Milly added her entreaties to Caroline's, and so it came to pass that Clerehead actually suffered himself to be persuaded—somewhat reluctantly (for he had a touch of my complaint) to accompany the girls as their escort to America.

Mrs. Le Blanc told me that when he came to make his adieux at Florence Villa, he tried hard to induce Clara to accept an engagement ring, but in vain, that he left the house in anger, though she smiled sweetly, and called after him : " We pray Heaven to have you in its holy keeping."

At Caroline's request I went down to Liverpool to see her off.

Clerehead and I sat in our own room at the Adelphi the night before they started (to perpetrate an Irishism) until two in the morning over a pipe and a glass of grog.

When we had settled all our business matters he burst out—

" Look here, Bob, every man fights for his own hand, when there's a woman in the case ; but, so long as we fight fair, there should be no ill-feeling between us ; so, suppose we let that matter slide.

" Now, I want to give you a straight tip.

"Of course, you'll have to stick to the shop while I'm away; but a month's soon gone. When I come back you must cut this game—it isn't 'good enough.' It's sorry work for you to have nothing better to do than to drill a pack of duffers into the principles of the English language. Sink it, and go into the author line. That 'Orpheus' was smart, and you can do better things."

"But how am I to do better things?"

"Oh, easy enough—hammer at it—don't consume the midnight oil though, that's a grave mistake.

"Turn out at eight—tub—don't shave; in fact, I wouldn't shave at all, if I were you; let your beard grow, it looks distinguished, especially when a fellow can cultivate a blacking-brush like yours, under his nose. Have a cup of strong coffee and a rusk. Don't breakfast until after work. Skim the papers while you swallow your coffee, so as to nail the latest sensation. Then follow Tony Trollope's advice, get an ounce of cobbler's wax, stick it on a stool, stick yourself a-top of it, take a double-barrelled pen (one of Gillott's), best ink and paper you can get, and plenty of it; fire away at nine, and stick to it till one—that's four hours.

"Lytton did all his wonderful work in three hours a day. He told me so himself. Fact!

"When you've spun your reel, dress, and be off to the Club—*déjeuner à la fourchette*—then you're a gentleman for the rest of the day.

"Don't hide your light under a bushel—show yourself here, there, and everywhere—especially outside a horse. Never miss a big libel case—a first night—a private view of the pictures, or anything of that sort

Be always *en évidence* ; make yourself hail-fellow-well-met with the press-gang. Some of them are decent fellows when you come to know 'em. Don't be knocked over by a failure or two—they are nothing when you're used to them. The most successful authors have had the greatest number of failures ; hence, they have had the greatest chances of success. Get inside ' the ring,' and you can do pretty well what you like.

" Just look round at the shining lights. There's Bragg, and Bolster, and Bunkum. Bragg was an office boy in the Royal Rafflum Loan Office (Limited), capital about thirty quid, borrowed for the occasion—a post-dated cheque, and a bill stamp. Sixty per cent. Bill of Sale caper ; you know all about it.

" Bolster was a kind of Howell and James' young man, who was one of my actors, and wasn't up to much ; and Bunkum was a barrister, who never held a brief. All decent chaps in their way ; but, dash it all, old fellow, you've forgotten more than they ever learnt. So go ahead, dear boy. Only mind ! no blank verse, no tights (except for the women !). I prefer bags myself ; but, anyhow, draw the line at breeches ! Stick to the nineteenth century, ' the wondrous mother age.' If you go back to your classic twaddle you'll come a cropper.

" Here you are, here are a dozen dramas ready-made to your hand in the "D.T." of to-day. *Imprimis*, an absconding clerk, who robs his employer, a barrister, who got him off when he robbed his first master.

" A woman, whose sister takes her ' davy she has been drowned' in the Thames, and actually recog-

nizes the corpse ; only, unfortunately, the woman turns up alive, and swears she isn't dead.

"A druidical doctor, who cremates his kid a-top of a Welsh mountain by moonlight.

"A long firm swindle, an abduction, a murder, a fire; a railway collision, a shipwreck, a bigamous, trigamous, omnivorous beast of a parson, who marries half-a-dozen wives, licks and swindles 'em all, seduces his step-daughter, forges a certificate of his child's death, and hands over his progeny to a baby-farmer ! Shakespere isn't in it with this lot. Shake 'em up in a bag, dear boy, mix 'em together, and they'll lick your precious Pericles into fits.

"Now observe, young man, if any of these wonderful dramas 'strike ile,' I shall expect a commission.

"By Jingo !" looking at his watch, "I see you won't commence your career as a dramatist to-morrow, at any rate. Good-night; think of what I've said, old man."

Next morning I went aboard with them, and stayed till the last moment. A few minutes before the steamer weighed anchor, a telegram came to Caroline from the P—, to this effect—

"The P—ss and I wish you great good fortune in America."

The last bell rang; I bade Clerehead and Milly good-bye.

Then Caroline said, "Write me as soon as you can. If you hear anything, cable, and I'll come at a day's notice. Wish me good-speed. Good-bye; now kiss me, my brother."

With the dove's guilelessness shining through her clear, frank eyes, she lifted her innocent lips to mine; and, midst a mist of tears, we parted.

When I got ashore, I waited to take a last look, when who should I see stroll up the gangway of the hurricane deck but Frederick Augustus, Duke of Frogmore !

Decidedly that young man is not such a fool as he looks !

They wave their hats and handkerchiefs to me, the great ship moves off amidst the roar of the multitude ; and while they are steaming down the Mersey, I am on my way back to my lonely lodgings in Thanet Place.

On my arrival I find this telegram waiting from—

“ Fred Bronson, Railway Hotel, Carlisle.

“ I have found Jack here. Come at once.”

An hour afterwards I am in the Flying Scotchman, *en route* to the North.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARSON'S ADVENTURE AT CARLISLE.

"This is I, Hamlet the Dane!"

I HAVE already said that our friend Bronson was addicted to field sports. He was going to Ecclefechan (shade of Carlyle!) to run a couple of harriers for a coursing match, and he had invited a friend to accompany him, who had never seen this humane amusement.

They broke their journey at Carlisle, and put up at the Station Hotel. After dinner, of course, Fred enquired of the waiter if there was such a thing as a theatre in the place.

"Dunno about a theater, sir, but there's the Match Box on the sands."

"What do you mean by the 'Match Box?'"

"Why, it's a great big wooden place made of packing cases; so we call it the Match Box."

"Tom," said the parson to his friend, "Eureka! there's a play-house! Slip on your coat, old man, and let's have a look. Perhaps we may see some embryo Kean, or Jordan—who knows?"

"There's many a flower that's doomed to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air!"

And you, my man," to the waiter, "show us the way."

"All right, sir ; we can get there in ten minutes."

Passing through the main street, they reached the outskirts of the city ; and there, on a dreary sandy flat, stood the "Match Box."

"What are the prices ?" enquired the parson.

"Threepence, sixpence, and a shilling ; or if you would like a private box, sir, you can have one for five bob."

The parson elected to have a private box.

The "Match Box" was crowded with the proletariat of the city—simple, honest people, who listened to the actors perhaps with more interest and sympathy than more fashionable folk. The play itself was the everlasting "Hamlet." The fourth act was going on ; Ophelia was singing—

"How should I your true love know from such another one ?"

The poor girl sang and acted very fairly—in fact, the whole performance was of a very respectable character. The dresses, too, were not inappropriate—the scenery clean, but rather florid. No neutral tints here—honest red, and green, and white, laid on with a trowel.

During the performance perfect silence prevailed, but when the act-drop descended, flash, puff, crack, lucifers flashing, pipes smoking, nuts cracking, a thousand jaws going. These occupations seemed to afford these worthy people a kind of safety-valve, to emit the animal spirits kept under control, while the actors were on the stage.

Hush ! the curtain is going up. Out with pipes, stow the nut-cracking, silence ! The last act of the play is about to commence.

The grave-diggers enter, the principal clown is evidently a favourite, for every sentence elicits a roar. When his fooling is done (and excellent fooling it is), he despatches his colleague "to Vaughan for a stoup of liquor;" then crooning out a fragment of an old song, he bestows himself to the completion of Ophelia's grave.

While he is thus engaged, Hamlet and Horatio enter from the back, then, a general hush falls on the audience, as the Prince is heard to enquire—

"Has this fellow no feeling of his business that he sings at grave-making?"

"That voice!" says Bronson, "Tom! Tom! Look, look! Wake up!" for his friend had fallen asleep. "That's Herbert's voice, if ever I heard it in my life. And, by Jove, it is Jack himself."

Looking at the play-bill, Fred found Hamlet was by Mr. Bellamy.

Now Bronson knew all about Jack's disappearance, the advertisement in the "Times," &c., so keeping well out of sight of the stage, he wrote a telegram with his pencil on the back of the play-bill, stating that Herbert was found; he then despatched his friend to the station to forward the message to me, while he mounted guard over the truant.

It will be remembered that Hamlet is never off the stage in the last act, from the time he comes on, until the end of the tragedy—obviously, there was no opportunity for speaking to him until after the curtain fell.

During the performance Bronson kept out of sight, as he had done on a former memorable occasion at Rosemount.

When the play was over he rose. At this moment Hamlet appeared before the curtain to acknowledge the plaudits of the audience. The unusual apparition of the stalwart parson in the private box, in his clerical garb, attracted the attention of the melancholy Dane, and Herbert (for it was he) saw that he was recognised, and strode rapidly off the stage. Bronson left the theatre as quickly as he could, but was obstructed by the people streaming out, for there was no farce, and the performance was over.

When he got to the back of the building, he found himself on the opposite side to the stage entrance; he tried back, and at length reached the stage door, and bolted in without ceremony.

The lights were down, a man and a lad were taking up the green baize.

"Mr. Bellamy! Where is Mr. Bellamy?" enquired Fred.

"There, sir—that's his dressing-room!" replied the man, pointing to the opposite side of the stage.

The parson rushed over, calling out—

"Herbert! Herbert! It is I—Bronson!" and, dashing open the first door he came to, he bounced into the ladies' dressing-room!

Imagine the poor parson's consternation when he found himself face to face with the "beauteous majesty of Denmark"—the fair Ophelia—young Osric, and another lady, more or less dressing, or undressed!

The ladies evidently thought some maniac had burst in among them, and they roused the theatre with their screams!

Bronson jumped out of the room even more quickly than he entered it, uttering a thousand apologies.

By this time, the actors, half dressed, emerged from the opposite side, and amongst them the manager, who had acted the King. He was a formidable-looking fellow, six feet high, and it was evident he had a temper of his own, for he let out at Bronson without waiting for the ceremony of an introduction.

"Confound you, sir! What do you want in my wife's dressing-room? For two pins I'd break every bone in your skin."

"Very sorry, I'm sure—quite a mistake."

"Mistake, be blanked? Every civilized being knows that strangers are not admitted behind the scenes of any theatre, however humble. Because our misfortunes have driven us to this hole, I suppose you think you may insult us with impunity!"

"I assure you," exclaimed Bronson, "I meant no insult. I am a clergyman. The gentleman who played Hamlet is an old friend of mine, and I was anxious to see him—hence this intrusion. I hope, sir, you will accept my apologies, and explain to the ladies how concerned I am at having alarmed them."

"Say no more, sir. Say no more. An 'affront handsomely acknowledged becomes an obligation.' I'll take you to Mr. Bellamy myself." So saying, the manager led the parson to a small temporary dressing-room in the opposite corner. Approaching the door he knocked gently. No reply. He waited a moment, and then knocked again.

"Mr. Bellamy," he said, "a gentleman, a friend of yours, wishes to see you."

Still no reply.

"Strange," said the manager, and he knocked again,

loudly this time. Receiving no answer, he threw open the door. The room was empty, the bird had flown. There lay Hamlet's street clothes, but there was no Hamlet!

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the manager, "why, he must have gone home in his stage dress! I never knew him do that before; he's a perfect gentleman, but very eccentric, and we're obliged to humour him a little. If you'll wait a moment till I've slipped my traps on, I'll go down with you to his lodgings."

In a few minutes he returned fully equipped.

"One moment," he said; then, going over to the ladies' dressing-room, he tapped at the door.

"Arabella, my love, Styles shall see you home. Bellamy is in one of his tantrums, and I must look him up. I may be an hour or more, so don't sit up. Ta-ta, darling! This way, sir."

Off they went, right through the city, till they reached the outskirts, in the direction exactly opposite the theatre. Presently they came to a row of cottage houses. They were all so quiet and peaceful, that it seemed as if everybody must have gone to bed long ago. At the very top house of the row, however, there was a light in the window.

"Here we are, and evidently he's up yet." With that, the manager knocked at the door.

It was opened instantly by a little elderly lady, with white hair and a widow's cap.

"Has Mr. Bellamy gone to bed, ma'am?"

"No, Mr. Eccleston, he's not come home yet," said the widow, "but I expect him every minute. Will you step in and wait till he comes?"

"Thank you, m'm; you are very kind, if you

won't object to my pipe. Sorry I can't offer you a cigar, sir."

Bronson produced his well-seasoned briar-root, and smiled benignantly as he replied—

"This is worth more to me than all the cigars imported from Havannah. It has been my soother, companion, friend, for I don't know how long."

The parson and the player puffed away at their pipes, and at first the time passed pleasantly enough.

When Eccleston thawed, Bronson found him "another good man gone wrong." He had been "plucked" at Oxford, got stage-struck, took a London theatre, acted Romeo, lost three or four thousand pounds in a month, fell in love with Juliet, and married her. Banished by his family, and disinherited by his father, he went into the country to act; failed miserably, lost an only child, took to drink, got from bad to worse, was driven out of the respectable theatres. Then he resolved to "put in the peg;" became a total abstainer, and now was in a fair way to retrieve the past.

"The misfortune is," he said, "I've discovered that I'm a cruel, bad actor. I shall never do much that way—but I flatter myself I know something about stage-management; and Arabella, my wife (the lady who played Ophelia)—ah! she'll 'strike ile,' depend upon it, one of these fine days."*

Time passed; the poor little widow got tired, and the men became impatient. Twelve o'clock, one, two, yet no sign of Herbert.

At length the parson enquired—

* Arabella has "struck ile." She made a wonderful hit at the Great International the other day, and Eccleston is stage-manager at the Megatherium, at a very handsome salary.

"Has he ever been out so late as this before, ma'am?"

"Never, sir."

"I really don't think we ought to trespass on this lady any longer, Mr. Eccleston," said Bronson.

"Nor I either," the manager replied. "I'm very sorry, Mrs. Wilton, that we've kept you up so late."

"Don't mention it, gentlemen," said the little woman; "but should any harm come to the poor gentleman—oh! dear, oh! deary me. I can't bear to think of it."

"Let us hope for the best," quoth the parson, leaving his card and half-a-sovereign. "You'll let me know the moment he comes back, won't you?"

"Oh! yes. You may be sure of that," replied the widow.

And so they bade her good-night, or rather, good-morning, and made the best of their way to the hotel, where they found Fred's friend in a terrible state of anxiety. He was not too anxious, however, to do ample justice to the substantial supper which awaited them.

They kept it up so late, that Bronson was fast asleep when I routed him out at about ten o'clock the next morning. As soon as he realized where he was, Fred told me the story I have here endeavoured to relate.

After breakfast we strolled down to the "Match Box." The players were rehearsing the music of *Macbeth* (and very well they did it, too).

After the experience of the preceding night, the parson was very punctilious in sending in his card, and I, of course, sent mine. Eccleston came out, and we were ceremoniously introduced. He was really a fine

distinguished-looking fellow. Apparently very much depressed, he said to Bronson —

“I was coming to see you, sir. I got this note five minutes ago by the second postal delivery. It is endorsed outside —

“ ‘ Immediate and important. Too late to obtain a stamp.’ ”

There was no mistake about the hand.

The letter was to this effect —

“ My DEAR MR. ECCLESTON,

“I am compelled to terminate my engagement at a moment’s notice. My absence will, I am afraid, inconvenience you ; but there is no help for it. Like poor Lear —

‘ To deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.’

“Forgive and forget me as soon as possible. Make my respectful adieux to Mrs. Eccleston, and believe that your kindness and consideration will never be forgotten by the unfortunate

“ BELLAMY.”

Baffled again !

Inviting the manager to accompany us, we went first to Herbert’s lodgings.

On our way thither Eccleston informed us that “ Mr. Bellamy ” had joined the company a short time previous at Dumfries—that he was very quiet and reserved, but somewhat strange in his manner—rarely or ever speaking to anyone out of the business of the theatre, and, in point of fact, this was ¹all the information I could obtain.

Upon arriving at the lodgings, we found Herbert had

not returned, nor had he sent any message. Thence we went to the Police Office, where we could obtain no clue whatever to his mysterious disappearance. It was only too evident that he had left the city.

Of course it was useless to further prolong my stay ; so thanking Bronson for his trouble, and desiring Eccleston to write if any news transpired—cruelly disappointed and utterly disheartened, I again returned to town.

CHAPTER V.

SUNDERED.

“Not to be with you, not to see your face,
Alas! for me, then, my good days are done!”

THE gulf continues to widen imperceptibly between Clara and me.

She is always preoccupied, and I am always embarrassed and distant.

I have occasional evidence that, though Clerehead is on the other side of the “ditch,” he contrives to keep his memory green in Regent’s Park.

I am bidden to dinner the third Sunday after his departure, to partake of some canvas-back ducks and other transatlantic delicacies, which he has sent from Staten Island. I know I am an ass, but those canvas-back ducks stick in my gizzard, or, rather, would have done so, had I tried to swallow them, so I send Cassidy on Sunday morning with a note to Mrs. Le Blanc, pleading a severe headache, and saying that the doctor has prescribed a pull on the river.

I go and I row, and am about as lively as Charon taking toll on the Styx.

When night falls, I am watching her chamber as usual—always watching.

I am not invited the following Sunday. Of course

not,*for Clerehead has returned, and the fatted calf is to be killed in honour of his arrival. I wait, and watch. Am I a man or a beast that I do these things? Alas! I love her—I love her—that is all!

He comes to dinner, elate and confident; but, thank goodness, he goes away early, and depressed—there is some comfort in that!

It is summer now. The window is open. Hark! she is singing the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire's old song from "The Stranger."

"I have a silent sorrow here,
A grief I'll ne'er impart;
It breathes no sigh, it sheds no tear,
But it consumes my heart."

Then she breaks down and weeps—and I cannot be there to soothe, to console her! If I only dared—if I—but she rises, puts out the light, retires, and "leaves the world to darkness and to me."

My visits become rarer, and rarer still.

Sometimes I call on Mrs. Le Blanc about some trifling literary matters, in which we are jointly interested, especially an adaptation of an unacted play of Shakspere, which (despite Clerehead's dictum), I think will, nay, shall, set the Thames on fire some day, or night. There is a big dual part for Clara, and she knows it, yet, though she listens and listens, with her great beautiful eyes dilating, her bosom palpitating, she doesn't condescend to utter one word. I put it to any reasonable man, especially to any author, if this is not hard to bear?

Mrs. Le Blanc says all sorts of kind things, and *she* remains silent. I am silent too, and then I suddenly remember I have an appointment, and take my leave abruptly.

I have not only ceased to dine at Florence Villa on Sunday, but I have also ceased to escort Clara to church.

Clerehead takes her two Sundays running, but his piety and his patience are both exhausted by the effort. Even for her sake, he can't stand Father P—'s sermons (and I don't wonder at it; I can't stand 'em myself!) so she goes alone, for the future.

She is a devout Catholic, and attends regularly to her devotions. I am not a Catholic, and I am not devout, still, I find myself at her church regularly every Sunday, that is, at Vesper time (for Father P— doesn't preach then!) Each Sunday I resolve that I will go no more, and then I end by saying, "I will go to-night; 'tis the last time." And so it is—till the next time comes!

She sits aloft with the choir, and sings; I sit below, and listen. When she leaves the church, I dog her footsteps home, and wait and watch as usual, and then return to my solitary chambers and dream myself to sleep. The days pass into weeks, the weeks into months, until at length a year, a whole weary year, has passed away.

"Thus, while the past is surely gone,
The gloomy future still unseen,
I think of what I might have won,
And fancy things that should have been."

END OF BOOK THE SIXTH.

BOOK THE SEVENTH.

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CHAPTER I.

I AM A SUCCESSFUL DRAMATIST.

“Seest thou not what a deformed thief this fashion is?”

AMERICA is the paradise for fair women, and during the past twelve months, Caroline has set the States on fire—from New York to the City with the Golden gates—with the light of her genius, and the radiance of her beauty.

I seek not to depreciate her rare gifts, though I could wish they had better scope than in my miserable “Orpheus.” It does seem hard, though; here is my poor darling eating her heart out with disappointed ambition.

Clever as he is, what an ass Clerehead must be! With his opportunities for pulling the strings, and manipulating public opinion, he might have made her the greatest creature of the age; then, her vanity flattered, her ambition gratified, her heart might be touched. And then, alas! what would become of me? Am I selfish that I thank God he hasn’t the brains to think of this? Perhaps!

To return to Caroline; in this incredibly short period she has (so Clerehead tells me) made a large fortune; and he is going over “the ditch,” to advise her how to invest it in mortgages, in mines, in landed

estate, in petroleum springs, and Heaven knows what besides ! And then he is to bring her and Milly home.

All this in twelve short months !

Only think ! Great Fanny Kemble, Glorious Helen Faucit ; Goddesses ! Pallas, Herè, Aphrodite, Thalia, Melpomene—All the Muses incarnate in flesh and blood ! Macready, greatest tragedian in the universe ; Admirable, accomplished, and gentlemanly Charles Kean ; Rugged Sam Phelps, one of our best tragedians, and certainly the greatest comedian in the world ; Genial Charles Mathews, Jovial Bucky, Rare old Ben : all these choice and master spirits, toiled and struggled from youth to age, and esteemed themselves lucky to be enabled to retire upon a miserable pittance of a few thousand pounds ; while this girl of five-and-twenty, and others, with not a scintillation of her ability, leap at one bound to fame and fortune !

“A mad world, my masters”—a world where the best showman is the best actor, and the greatest author !

But what am I to sneer at my brother charlatans—I, who have turned showman myself ?

Yes ! I have taken Clerehead’s advice, and find it much pleasanter, and far more profitable, to write plays than to act them ; and, strange to say, the British public, who wouldn’t stand my play-acting, will stand my plays ! Poor, stupid B. P. !

Then, I’ve dropped my lines in pleasant places. I’ve encountered a man of genius, in the shape of a manager. A man did I say ? I don’t do him justice. He is “three single gentlemen rolled into one”—actor, author, and manager combined ; Garrick, Rich, and Sheridan in one and the same person, with a dash of

E. T. Smith and Phineas T. Barnum into the bargain!

My manager's modesty is even greater than his skill. He blandly tells the public that he is the greatest author, actor, and manager in the world; and if he tells them so long enough, I shouldn't be surprised if they begin to believe him, by-and-bye—in fact, I'm not sure but some people begin to believe him already!

We collaborate, that is to say, I suggest a subject, he suggests a distinction without a difference; I invent a plot, he suggests an alteration; I suggest a hansom cab, and a live horse, a steam engine, a railway train, and a fishing smack, then he caps me with a coach and four horses (alive), two steam engines, two trains, and a collision (real of course), and a schooner, full rigged and in full sail, that works round, sending her bowsprit on a voyage of discovery into the dress circle!

My collaborator has got his head screwed on rightly. He is wise in his generation, and, having accurately gauged the intelligence of his public, he gives it exactly what it wants. Apart from this, he is a generous, large-hearted fellow, and we understand each other perfectly. He gets all our wonderful "properties" made cheaply, and sells them, when we've done with them, at prime cost. Between us, we've abolished those nuisances "front scenes."

As for the dialogue, that's quite a secondary consideration. I spin it off by the yard, as the spider spins her web, and he cuts it, and spoils it occasionally (at least, so I think); but he says that's mere prejudice on my part. Anyhow, I don't complain, it "pleases him and doesn't hurt me;" and if the dear, intelli-

gent British public is satisfied with the article, we manufacture, what does it matter?

While I play on the organ, my friend blows the bellows, and advertises our joint productions splendidly. Then we dispose of the provincial and American rights for fabulous sums, and divide the plunder between us.

We have already arranged for our next production, "My Wife's Sister's Husband," to be translated into every European tongue; indeed, I should not be surprised if it were done in Hindostanee, Chinese, and Japanese, Sanscrit, Choktong, and Cherokee. It is nearly long enough, if not quite (seven acts and fifteen tableaux). If our great sensation, "The Battle of the Balloons," with the "nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue," doesn't "knock 'em," why the sacking of the House of Lords, and the cremation of the Bench of Bishops, by the Amazonian army of wives' sisters, is bound to "fetch 'em."

This will be the most realistic scene the stage has ever witnessed. No wretched supers, but ladies, live ladies, all real wives' sisters, "condemned to pine and wither on the virgin thorn" through the barbarity of the Hereditary Legislature. Then the peers of the minority, real, live peers (in real peers' robes, none of your Iolanthe trumperies), have kindly promised their valuable services for the occasion, in consideration of my friend providing their sons and daughters with suitable openings in his next pantomime, at the customary guinea a week for beginners.

Thus, by following Clerehead's advice, at a bound I have leaped into the foremost rank of living dramatists!

"Evil communications corrupt good manners." Naturally I find it my game to join in the chorus of

depreciation of Shakespere, Lytton, Sheridan Knowles, and other old-fashioned fogies.

Shakespere never wrote "My Wife's Sister's Husband." He couldn't do it. Psha! Away with the cap and bells!

If, instead of being a concoctor of sordid melodrame, I could soar to Olympian heights which would qualify me to touch the hem of "the master's" singing robes, even that crowning glory of my life would be but "as sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals," unless she were by my side to share it with me.

But she!—alas!

CHAPTER II.

THE STROLLERS.

“He entrenched himself in his cruel pride,
Nor deigned he a single word to speak,
Nor dreamt he once of her bitter tears,
Or the stricken heart that was nigh to break.”

I AM making my fortune in London by my rubbishing plays—Caroline has already made hers in America. Clara has entirely recovered her health; but where is He, where is Herbert?

It will be remembered that the last time he ever saw Caroline was at the moment when he rescued her from the fire.

During his delirium he was, of course, unconscious of the agonies of her parting, of the bitter check to her pure and proud ambition, in being compelled to prostitute her great genius to the lowest form of art, solely in order to rescue him from his difficulties; nay, to actually provide him with the means of subsistence, during his illness.

He dreamt not of the anguish of the faithful heart whose whole life was one lament for her lost love. He only knew that since the time he had imperilled his life to save hers, he had never once seen her—never once heard from her.

Alas! how should he know that she had written repeatedly, that her letters had arrived during the period of his unconsciousness, and that, by some fatality, they had miscarried, and were lost?

As for Clara, I solemnly believe—believe? I *know*, that if, during that unfortunate interview at Harrogate, he had given her the slightest chance, she would have told him of the arrival, and subsequent miscarriage of those fateful letters!

After this, she awaited their coming from day to day with impatience and anxiety, resolved to deliver them to him the moment they arrived.

While she watched and waited, came the arrest at Claremount, with its subsequent train of horrors; and so the opportunity passed, never to return.

On the face of her continued silence, it seemed to Herbert's distempered mind that Caroline had deserted him. Besides this, he considered she had degraded herself and him by appearing in a class of entertainment which she knew he loathed. I, too, had been *particeps criminis* to the transaction, inasmuch as I had written the hateful piece, and doubtless, he thought, negotiated the engagement.

He saw, too (for the unhappy man devoured every line that was written about her), her name continually and intimately associated, in certain scandalous society papers, with that of Frogmore. To-day it was announced they were engaged; to-morrow, it was delicately insinuated they were married, or, if not, that they *ought* to be!

Then the agonies of grief, rage, jealousy, and despair tortured his proud heart, and preyed upon his very vitals. In one little hour, he might have ascer-

tained the utter falsity of these infamous *canards* ; but his cruel pride always intervened. In prosperity, it had been his besetting sin ; in adversity, it had become something far worse.

At length came my advertisement. That very day he also saw the announcement of her marriage with Frogmore, which filled the cup of his anger to overflowing.

"So they would pension me, I suppose !" he exclaimed.

Then he wrapped himself up more closely than ever in the bitterness of his delusive disdain.

O'Brien had said, but too truly, that poor Jack had a "kink" in his brain, occasioned doubtless, by the ruffianly outrage at Bolingbroke ; and this, combined with his now dangerous delusion on the subject of Caroline's supposed perfidy, fairly upset his reason !

He was at the zenith of his powers ; he had only to hold his finger up, and he might have been engaged at any theatre in the kingdom ; instead of which he shunned sympathy, nursed his despair, and, like the Spartan boy of old, suffered it to devour his heart in silence.

At last he saw in the newspapers that *she* and the Duke had gone to America together !

From that moment, though quite self-contained and reasonable upon all other topics, upon that particular subject he became a confirmed monomaniac. Of course, the poor fellow's mania was the more strongly developed, because it was confined to his own bosom. His lips were sealed. Believing himself abandoned by me, he had no friend to whom he could unburden his sorrow. He was alone—evermore alone !

Even now, it appears to me incredible, that he did not realize that so long as I, his old comrade, had a home, or a shilling, he should never want for either. Howsoever that might be, he still held aloof; and, despite our repeated advertisements, and continual enquiries, we could obtain no information regarding him.

What became of him during this long and dreary interregnum, I do not know, even to this day.

Long after, however, certain memoranda which fell into my hands, afforded me some clue to, at least, one of his many bitter experiences.

In a previous portion of this narrative, I have stated that he did some little kindness to a company of itinerant players, who were in trouble through their primitive theatre being blown down upon a certain memorable Christmas.

About a month after his mysterious disappearance from Carlisle, these poor people were located in a small town amidst the mountains of Yorkshire.

It was the very place where, some few years before, the Vicar's daughters, their shawls thrown over their heads, after the homely fashion of the district, were wont to come nightly to see the play.

I have often wondered whether Charlotte, when she saw Rachel in the Théâtre de la Monnaie, on the memorable occasion described so vividly in "Villette," recalled the poor rural players in the canvas-topped shed in her native village.

Night was falling, and the snow lay heavy and deep upon the ground for miles and miles around, when a tall, gaunt man strode wearily along till he came to anchor in front of Wylder's "Thespian."

Temple" at Haworth. He was clad in a great loose military-looking overcoat, the collar of which stood up to his ears. Round his neck was a white woollen muffler, and a soft, dark, clerical felt hat was pulled down over his brows, so that, between the muffler and the hat, his face was completely concealed.

Immediately adjacent was the van in which the manager's family lived and travelled from place to place. The smoke curled briskly out of the small-spouted iron chimney; the white curtains looked clean, and bright, and tidy; and the fire, from within, reflected a ruddy glow through the windows.

After a moment's pause, the stranger approached the door, knocked, and enquired for the manager.

"Come in!" exclaimed a cheery voice. "It's a gay night, for sure, to be standing out in the snow. Come in, lad, and tak' a smell o't fire, and let's see what I can do for you."

The man stepped into the van, and threw off his coat and hat.

The moment the manager caught sight of his face, he exclaimed—

"Gracious God! why, Mary, wench, it's Maister Herbert!"

And so it was.

Many and many a weary mile had he tramped through the snow, before he reached this harbour of refuge.

Without circumlocution, he stated that he was seeking an engagement. As it was essential to preserve his incognito, for fear of arrest, he couldn't act in his own old towns, nor under his own name. He said also, that he had neither properties nor dresses,

and that he couldn't study a single line, but, in all his old parts, he was still available. Then he broke down, and said he wanted bread!

Poor Jack! what he must have suffered to come to that! I don't mean to want bread, but to *avow* that he wanted it!

The manager roared out—

"Here, I say, misses, whiskey and hot watter, ham and eggs! Thear, thear, sit down. Lord love your dear heart; sit down, Captin, mak' yoursen at home. Off with them wet boots. Here, Mary, *luv*, hand over them stockings. Thear you are, sir!" and he took Herbert in his great strong arms as if he were a baby, put him into the chair before the fire, pulled off his damp boots and stockings, chafed his poor frozen feet into life, clapped on them a pair of warm Shetland hose, and his own slippers, and forced a stiff tumbler of boiling whiskey and water down his throat, "just to restore the circulation," as he said, "while the missus was a gettin' the tay ready."

This genial welcome knocked Herbert over altogether; for, despite his infernal pride, when touched in the right place, he was as gentle as a woman. Presently, however, he recovered, and it must be confessed did ample justice to Mrs. Wylder's humble but substantial repast.

Then Tom Wylder, a fine, big, burly Yorkshireman (he was manager and principal tragedian and comedian to boot!) said—

"Now, look here, Maister John, it isn't for a grand gen'leman like you to pal with the likes of us; but if you'll cum' and tak' the best we can give—may God do so much to me and more—if you shan't be to me as

my father was that's dead, or the little brother that's in heaven!

"Look here, sythee. I've gotten two hundred goolden suv'rins in t' lucky bag. Turn 'em out, missus, and I'll send to Sam May's for t' props, this blessed minit. You shall act when you like, and what you like; I'll tog you up like a prince, and you shall be boss o' t' show. Thear, s'help me God!"

I've suffered honest Tom's adjuration to remain exactly as he uttered it, in the hope that if the recording angel happened to be in the neighbourhood he will not remember it, to the poor stroller's disadvantage, at the day of reckoning.

For twelve months and more—"the world forgetting, and by the world forgot"—Herbert acted all his old famous parts in small towns and villages, under the unpretentious pseudonym of Mr. Barton.

Amongst these humble, but faithful, friends, his slightest wish was anticipated, and his will was law; everybdy loved him, but the women and children adored him.

His health was partially restored; more important still, his mind was gradually recovering its balance, when, alas! his honest friend Tom was struck down with typhoid fever, and died after a few days of excruciating suffering.

The troupe was disbanded, and poor Jack was once more cast on the world; yet still he made no sign!

Two months or more passed without his earning a shilling. When he had got to his last sovereign he started forth upon an aimless journey.

That very day—that very hour—Caroline left New

York, accompanied by almost royal honours, valedictory addresses, bands of music, and other Barnum and Bunkum demonstrations, thinking all the while only of the man who, weary and footsore, frozen with cold, and famished with hunger, was again tramping through the cruel winter's snow, over the dreary wolds of Yorkshire.

CHAPTER III.

CLEREHEAD GETS HIS CONGÉ.

“Then learned I, from the sudden the start
Of jealous pain,
That I had found within my heart,
My youth again!”

I MET Caroline at Liverpool, on her return from America, with Clerehead. Of course she was attended by Milly and Frogmore. They all appeared to have benefited by their travels.

Her first words to me were of Herbert. I could not find it in my heart to tell her of Bronson's adventure at Carlisle, and as yet I knew nothing myself of the episode related in the last chapter.

I really thought poor Jack was dead; in fact, I was convinced he was, feeling assured that if alive, he must have seen the advertisements, and that he would not remain obdurate to the continued appeals of his old friend. She, however, would not entertain the idea of his death for a moment.

“If he were dead,” said she, quietly, but apparently with profound belief, “I should know it, because I should have seen him.”

Of course, after this, there was no more to be said.

After a few weeks' rest, she prepared for her forth-

coming engagement at the Frivolity, and I was hard at work upon my new idyll, "The Judgment of Paris," in which she had selected Aphrodite, for her reappearance.

Frogmore continued her devoted friend and servant; he had had many temptations among the fair Americans; "there's such divinity doth hedge" a duke, that half the bright eyes in the States tried to lure him from his allegiance, but in vain.

Poor lad! I knew (for I heard from her every week, as she heard from me) that his, like mine, was a hopeless passion; but I suppose he felt, like myself, and "the other one"—

"'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all!"

Howsoever that might be, he continued indefatigable in his attentions.

As for Caroline, she never went out without Milly, nor Milly without her, and neither of them stirred abroad without Frogmore.

The world allotted them both to him with impartial alternation. To-day he was engaged to Caroline—tomorrow to Milly. It was hard to say which of the two was the more detested by Belgravian mothers, who had marked him for their own proper prey, and who gnashed their teeth (if they had any!) when they beheld these girls at all first nights, concerts, exhibitions, and the like, attended by their devoted cavalier.

During the past twelve months Milly had ripened into a beautiful young woman, and her fair fresh loveliness, contrasted admirably with Caroline's superb, pale majesty.

It was one of the sights of the season to see them in

the Row, for their habits became them to perfection, and they were both admirable horsewomen.

Clerehead and Clara, too, rode together in the Park frequently. He had improved a little in his equitation, while, as for her, I think she could have lived on horseback. Her *personelle* was so striking and distinguished that no one could look on any other woman while she was present. Hence I really think that, apart from his increasing regard, his vanity was flattered by the general and involuntary homage paid to her beauty.

Our friend the "Gipsey" was in town, and very often gave me a mount, so that I was not altogether left in the cold.

One lovely afternoon we were trying to get through the crowd at "The Corner," when a certain illustrious personage came and "declared on" to my friend. Of course, I dropped into the rear. Presently who should we encounter but Caroline, Milly, and the Duke?

The distinguished personage I have mentioned, immediately left us, and went to pay his devoirs to Caroline, and to make enquiries about the American trip, &c.

Just at this moment who should emerge from the throng in the opposite direction but Clerehead and Clara?

The two women had never met since the night of "The Rival Queens," and I trembled with anxiety, for I really knew not what might happen. Fortunately the crowd was so great that they passed without recognizing each other, whereupon I breathed freely and cantered on.

Sooner or later, however, they must meet, and then—what then?

A week afterwards we received invitations for the Academy soirée. As yet none of us had seen the pictures. Clerehead was to be Clara's cavalier, and I had promised to escort Mrs. Le Blanc.

When I arrived at Florence Villa I found the ladies dressed, and Clerehead first in the field. He was, as usual, endeavouring to make himself agreeable, but this time not succeeding according to his wont. Clara was *distracte*, and Mrs. Le Blanc looked *géné*; in point of fact, she always did so when Clerehead was to the fore. The poor dear used to tell me, that he generally contrived to make her feel she was one too many. Indeed, she often proposed to retire, but Clara would rarely, if ever, permit her to do so, hence my presence for once seemed a timely relief to everyone.

Mrs. Le Blanc bustled about and gave me a cup of tea. She knew that I have a feminine weakness for "the deadly cup," so she kept the best, and always brewed it afresh for me.

Crossing her fingers to signify that Clara is out of temper, she whispers—

"And I don't wonder at it, Robert, for what do you think? That abominable trunk which we lost on our journey to Harrogate, after all this time has 'turned up' to-day, and I don't know where it hasn't been to. To the North Pole I should think from its dilapidated appearance. Everything is destroyed except Clara's little writing-case, and she has made as much fuss about that, as if it were filled with Bank of England notes, instead of a dozen or two dirty old letters."

At this moment the carriage draws up at the door, and Clerehead, looking at his watch, says—

"Time's up."

Mrs. Le Blanc says—

“Robert, you are my cavalier. Come and see what a nice *boutonnière* I’ve got for you.”

I retire into the back part of the room, and submit to my button-holing like a martyr. I hear Clerehead, who is sitting beside Clara on an ottoman at the other end of the room, say significantly—

“Bob is always button-holed. Must I go undecorated?”

I am standing with my back to them, but the mirror before me reflects what is going on in the opposite direction. For the second time I have reason to feel grateful to a piece of plate glass.

Clara rises mechanically, and wearily, it seems to me, plucks a flower or two from her bouquet—is in the act of placing it in Clerehead’s coat, when he does something which sends every drop of blood in my body in one rush to my heart, and then, in another moment (for surely my heart must have burst) back into my knuckles!

Let me endeavour to describe the incident accurately.

At the moment she is in the act of placing the posy in his button-hole, he whispers in her ear. Then suddenly he clasps her waist with his left arm, and draws her closely to him. In a flash, her two hands are upon his chest—with the impact they both recoil a couple of paces distance, and stand looking at each other, eye to eye.

There is a ring in his hand, a posy in hers.

She flings the unoffending flowers in the fire—he throws the ring in after it. She goes over to the piano, and improvises a fantasia, as we return to the front room. All this is done quietly, noiselessly, and in far less time than it takes to describe.

“Good people,” says Clara, “I am *désolé*. Our friend here, has bethought him of a most important engagement, which will preclude the possibility of his taking us to see the pictures to-night.”

“Yes, most important,” replied Clerehead. “By Jove! I fear I shall be late as it is. I know you will excuse me, so *au revoir*.”

“No,” said Clara, gravely. Then rising and making a stately curtsy. “Not ‘*au revoir*!’ *Adieu*!—Mr. Clerehead.”

“*Adieu* then,” he replied, and bowing with dignity, he left the room.

A moment later, and his carriage was being driven furiously away.

That was his last visit to Florence Villa. He had played his best card—played it badly, and lost the game!

Ten minutes before I hated the man, now I felt sorry for him—but the two women (how barbarous are women to those that love them—upon my honour, I think they are worse even than men!) were perfectly ebullient. Mrs. Le Blanc, who had never attempted to disguise her aversion for Clerehead, knew, and rejoiced to know, that her enemy was discomfited and had got his *congé*—while Clara appeared as if she had shaken off an incubus. I alone remained sad and silent. “A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind.” It was his turn to-day—it might be mine to-morrow.

Mrs. Le Blanc, however, soon recalled me to myself.

“Now, Robert,” she said, “this is like old times—you’ll have to escort us both. I’ll send round to Clarke’s for the brougham”—and then she whispered archly—“I think my posy has brought you luck, sir!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE PICTURE.

“ Would you not deem it breathed, and that these veins
Did verily bear blood ? ”

THE Academy was more than usually crowded. All the world and his wife were there. Princes and Princesses of the blood jostled with great generals and gallant admirals, their breasts ablaze with medals won in famous battles by land and sea. The Grand Old Man and his stately wife “beamed” upon the obese Lord of Burleigh as if they had never broken a lance together; the airy Secretary for the Sister Isle appeared to chum with the grim leader of the Home Rulers. The man with “the coat of many colours” triumphantly displayed in his button-hole the latest thing in orchids; the great Marquis looked less glum than usual; and the gracious President (more like Roman Antony than ever) did the honours with his accustomed urbanity. The Foreign Ambassadors, the Chinese Legation, the Japanese Embassy, a famous Indian Prince (a charming person—fresh from the dethronement and murder of his brother!), glittered with all the jewels of the Orient, while Bishops and Archbishops *en grande tenue*, commingled with Judges, and heaven-borne hereditary legislators. The Lord Mayor,

and other city magnates, sedately splendid in black velvet, steel buttons, and civic chains, for once vouchsafed to rub shoulders with the motley mob of authors, orators, savants, African and Arctic travellers—lawyers, painters, publishers, sculptors, soldiers, sailors, journalists, and even actors and other obscure persons.

Conspicuous amongst a constellation of feminine loveliness, magnificently attired in the latest novelty from Worth's *atelier*, resplendent with gems, gorgeous in laces, eccentric and wonderful in gloves, ravishing in the most bewitching of coiffures, stood forth "La Belle Russe." No one knew by what back-stairs influence this woman had gained admittance into this select *coterie*; but there she was, convoyed by her latest conquest, a tall, handsome, wealthy young Attaché of the Austrian Legation, and holding her own with characteristic insolence and superb audacity.

I have given but a faint idea of the brilliant scene which met our eyes as we entered. The murmur of a thousand pleasant voices, with hundreds of brave men and beautiful women moving in graceful motion, made a picturesquely magnificent *ensemble*.

To-night Clara was something like her old self. She beamed with life and gaiety; and as we moved from picture to picture, she noted, with unerring accuracy, the features of the exhibition.

Caroline and Milly (who had preceded us but a few moments) attracted more attention than the glowing canvases which lined the walls, and indeed they entirely eclipsed the living beauties which surrounded them.

As they moved slowly towards the central room, accompanied by Frogmore, who, as usual, was their escort, they encountered an excited crowd which had

congregated in front of one picture. The loud hum of voices subsided into silence, and the distinguished mob opened out on either side as the two girls approached.

The silence then gave way to a general movement, of eager curiosity.

"La Belle Russe" superciliously levelled her *pince-nez* at Caroline; but the first gentleman in the room (or in Europe, for that matter) deliberately placed himself between her and the Russian, as he said—

"Miss Challoner, permit me to show you something which must, I am sure, possess special interest for you." Then he led her forward to the picture.

It was the "counterfeit presentment" of Hamlet and Ophelia before referred to. Though only life size, the figures appeared of almost colossal magnitude. Caroline scarcely cast one glance at her own likeness—all lovely though it was; she had eyes only for Him. There he stood, attired exactly as he was when last they had met on the night of the fire—the leonine head, the fell of golden hair, the true and tender eyes—fixed full upon her own—the majestic figure in the very act of springing forth from the canvas.

For a moment she remained motionless—the blood rushed to her brow, went back to her heart—then she turned pale as death; and, without a sound, even as she had fallen before his feet upon that awful night when he had plucked her from the jaws of death, even so she fell now, void of sense and motion.

At this very instant, while all around stood awed and spell-bound, as fate, or accident, would have it, we reached the spot. As Clara caught sight of the picture, she, too, stood transfixed. There, upon the ground lay the woman *He* loved; and there, towering above her,

stood the woman who loved *Him* ! Both young, lovely, and beloved, rich in all the world's choicest gifts, yet hungering fiercely, pining their proud hearts away, for one man's love—that man, alas ! an outcast, and a wanderer on the face of the earth.

Meanwhile, society stood dazed, as it contemplated the most striking picture exhibited in the Academy that night ; the meeting of those two unhappy women beneath the fateful shadow of the unfortunate man, whom they had both

“Loved, not wisely, but too well !”

Caroline lay with her head reclined in profile, as it were, upon her right arm, which was extended towards the picture ; her dark hair, bursting from the knot which bound it, covered her neck and shoulders, as with an iridescent mantle of sable, through which the other arm gleamed, white and beautiful as ivory ; while Clara stood erect, her hands clenched, her teeth fixed, her eyes still riveted on the picture.

Thus, for a moment, we all stood, as if transformed to stone ; the first to break the spell was Milly, who threw herself beside her friend, and, with the Duke's aid, tenderly lifted her head from the ground, resting it upon her knee.

A distinguished-looking old gentleman, who turned out to be Sir Henry H——, the eminent physician, came forward, and kneeling beside Caroline, felt her pulse and closed her eyelids. With a reassured look, he whispered something to the P—— ; then, turning to Clara, he tried to unclasp her hands, but tried in vain. Then he bade me get her home immediately.

“There is no danger,” he said ; “nothing but a

sudden shock to the nervous system. A few days' rest, and she will be quite well."

Finding that Caroline was being cared for, Mrs. Le Blanc and I endeavoured to lead Clara away; but she remained rigid and immovable, and we could not induce her to stir from the spot.

A mob is a mob everywhere—whether they are attired in swallow-tailed coats, and *décolletée* dresses, or in the rags and wretchedness of the slums; save that I think your fashionable mob the least sympathetic in existence.

Opinions were divided as to the tragedy going on before their eyes.

Some regarded it as Clerehead's last sensational advertisement for Caroline's reappearance at the Frivolity; others, as a remarkably fine tableau vivant, devised between the two women to attract attention to the picture of Hamlet and Ophelia.

"La Belle Russe," with a shrug of her opulent shoulders, lounged languidly across the room, leaving Caroline and Clara to their numerous sympathizers.

"Chut! Chut!" she murmured, contemptuously, to the Austrian. "I don't believe in women who faint, especially these play-acting people. It's one of the tricks of their trade. By-the-bye, who is the man? For, of course, there is a man in the case."

Leisurely adjusting her *pince-nez*, she proceeded to take stock of the picture. Then, just as if she had been appraising a horse, a bullock, or some other beast of burden, she continued—

"H'm! I understand. A fair piece of flesh for those hussies to fight about. Who is this young Hercules with the golden mane and big blue eyes, who

looks as if he is going to leap upon and devour us all?"

"Oh! I suppose one of the play actor people," the Austrian replied.

"This an actor? Psha! Nonsense! It isn't good form for the players to be manly, nowadays. They are nothing if not epicene. Half-a-dozen of those play-actor creatures wouldn't make a man like this. He is, for all the world, like one of those brawny, Gothic gladiators that the Roman women went mad about in the days of the Lower Empire; and I must say I rather admire their taste. Do you know, Oscar, I protest the Slav blood in my veins stirs, when I think of those women descending into the arena to fight for their men, in the eyes of all Rome. Ah! 'life was real, life was earnest;' life was worth living in those days. We are getting sadly too civilized. Yonder people of the pavement have the pull of us—they say what they mean, and do what they like, while we— Ah! if we could only rise superior to vulgar prejudice, the world would become endurable by-and-bye!"

"Why don't you put yourself forward, then, in the march of enlightenment, *ma chère Princesse*?" blandly enquired the Austrian.

"Why? Because, look you, in this excellent England, your parson does not practise what he preaches, so I preach what I may not practise. Besides, there is my husband! Why husbands were ever invented I can't understand, except to pay one's debts. Demetrius never pays mine though; *au contraire*, I have to pay his, as well as my own.

"Go away—you are a bad boy—and I—well, I'll think of it. Meanwhile I will take tea, and you shall

talk scandal—I like both ; we can imbibe the one and emit the other at the same time.” And so they moved away.

By this time Caroline’s carriage was waiting—the Duke and one of his friends lifted her gently from the ground, and moved with her towards the vestibule, accompanied by Milly and the doctor.

Clara, quietly extricating herself from Mrs. Le Blanc and myself, turned and followed—her hands still clenched together, and her eyes fixed.

The crowd gave way, and we kept side by side with her. When we reached the doors, Caroline was lifted into the carriage and Clara halted on the threshold—following the departing vehicle with eager eyes, until it disappeared. Then she began to thaw—her bosom heaved convulsively—her hands relaxed—and were stretched forth, as if in mute entreaty ; inarticulate sounds struggled to her lips, until at last I could distinguish the words—

“Alas ! alas ! the evil I have done !”

As we stood waiting for the brougham, I saw the wicked eyes of the Russian woman fixed upon us ; I heard her say quite aloud, and without the slightest affectation of reticence, to her Austrian cavalier—

“Is it a comedy, or a Porte St. Martin drama, these mummers are acting for our diversion ? *Ma foi*—it is amusing, and I dare say it would be interesting, if one could only see the sin of it.

“*Regardez cela, mon ami*—night and morning !

“Those big swarthy savages always have a *penchant* for those horrible red-headed women. *Chacun à son goût*. Being fair myself I naturally adore dark men—not exactly black—one must draw the line somewhere,

you know—suppose we say the Shah. Now, Desdemona didn't draw the line—and she came to grief in consequence. All the same, I bet a dozen pairs of gloves (Houbigant's sixteen buttons) to a quill toothpick, that yonder Desdemona will have that huge, gaunt nigger after all!"

Thank Heaven! my poor darling could not comprehend one syllable the creature uttered—but I stood, and writhed, and only wished the Austrian would afford me a decent pretext to shoot him—or, that his paramour had been a man, that I might have struck her to my feet! The Attaché, however, was wise in his generation, and remained discreetly undemonstrative, and so, with this wanton's ribald laughter ringing in our ears, we returned to Florence Villa.

CHAPTER V.

FOUND !

“ Too late ! Terrible words, too late ! ”

NEXT morning—when I call early at Morley’s—I meet Clerehead in the ante-room. The moment he sees me he exclaims—

“ Brain fever, by Jove ! I’ve never had such trouble in my life as I’ve had with these country actresses of yours—and all about a man ! *One* man too ! If there were only one man in the world I could understand it perfectly. Well—well—every Jack, except me, has his Jill—sometimes half-a-dozen of ’em for that matter—but it isn’t every Jill that gets her Jack. Here’s this young idiot Frogmore going mooning mad over a woman, who would sooner have Jack Herbert, without a shilling or a shirt, than she’d have this duffer of a Duke, if every hair on his head was hung with diamonds as big as walnuts ; and there’s my poor little darling Milly—the best girl on the face of the earth—has lost her heart to him—and the ass don’t see it ! Don’t talk to me—I’ve no patience with anything or anybody. But there, there ! I must cut my stick, and alter the advertisements. ‘ The Challoner ’ won’t be able to act this side of Christmas, that’s certain—and

‘The Judgment of Paris’ must be postponed *sine die*. And look here, Bob, I got a facer last night. It’s no use trying to look so innocent—you know all about it ! I am out of the hunt at Florence Villa, but I bear you no malice, old man ; stick to her, stick to her, and you are bound to win at last !”

Away he goes to see after his advertisements, while I drive to Regent’s Park.

Mrs. Le Blanc tells me that Clara has passed the night in alternations of sobbing and sleeping, and wild exclamations about “intercepted letters.”

For two days I oscillate betwixt Trafalgar Square and Florence Villa. Caroline is delirious, the doctor wants to cut off her hair ; but Milly pleads so piteously to spare it that he gives in, and the beautiful raven tresses remain intact.

Mrs. Le Blanc has an important communication to make. For the past two days Clara has been confined to her bed ; for the past two nights she has wandered in her sleep ; she gets up and lights a candle ; Mrs. Le Blanc, very much alarmed, naturally gets up and follows. She finds Clara at her desk in the drawing-room counting a packet of unopened but discoloured letters ; she counts them incessantly, beginning at one and ending at seven, and as incessantly reads the superscription, which, in most instances, is in a female hand, and runs thus—

“JOHN HERBERT, ESQ.,
“King’s Head Hotel,
“Kingstown.”

When she has counted them repeatedly, she returns.

them to her desk, locks it, returns to her chamber, muttering "Too late! too late!"

Being neither of us destitute of ordinary intelligence, we are not long in divining the truth. We both arrive at the conclusion that it is desirable, nay, even absolutely necessary, as a mere act of justice to Herbert, that Caroline should know the truth also.

Naturally I think that Mrs. Le Blanc had better break the ice herself.

She replies—"You know, Robert, how headstrong and impetuous Clara is. She may reproach me for playing the spy; she may even leave me. Then what should I do?—what should I do? She is as an only child to me. I am growing old, and cannot live without her. She would not lose your esteem for the world, and sometimes I have dared to hope—but time will show. Meanwhile, you know I have always been your friend; be mine, be hers; she will listen to you; you don't know how much she likes you; speak to her, advise her, tell her that it is her duty—see, she is here! God give you strength and courage for all our sakes!"

She leaves the room as Clara enters. She is pale and wan, her eyes fixed, her unkempt and abundant hair streaming down her shoulders over her white peignoir.

We meet with more than usual restraint, more than even usual embarrassment, and I leave her without daring even to broach the subject, far less to dictate a course of action.

When I arrived at Morley's Caroline is worse. Sir Henry tells me that her malady is that of a mind diseased, and all the physic in the pharmacopœia will do her no good.

“Mr. Penarvon,” said he, “Miss Clerehead tells me you are Miss Challoner’s oldest friend.

“Her life trembles in the balance.

“In her delirium she continually speaks of being stabbed by Roxana.

“Who, in the name of fate, is Roxana?

“Of a fire, in which she has been in great peril. Of Jack (whoever Jack may be), of his being ill; of a prison, in which he is, or has been immured, and of his having left her, ‘for that other one.’

“Of course, that ‘other one’ is a woman. Then she raves incessantly about some letters. Whether they have been sent to her, or whether she has sent them to some one—whether they have been intercepted or stolen I don’t know. If you can find a clue to this mystery you may, perhaps, save her life. I ought to tell you I fear she is subject to heart-disease; another attack like this may prove fatal. I can do no more for her. Good morning.”

I do not stop to think now; had I done so, I could never have mustered courage to pass the ordeal which I knew awaited me at Florence Villa.

I drive back at once; the door is open; I rush into the drawing-room; Clara is seated with her back to me, at her writing-desk; she is counting those very letters, and is actually reading the address aloud—

“John Herbert, Esq., King’s Head Hotel, Kingstown.”

A moment’s delay will prove fatal, so I plunge in at once.

“Those letters belong to John Herbert, and not to you, Miss Trevor!”

She springs to her feet, and the lid of the desk falls

with a bang; her eyes flash fire as she confronts me, and hisses through her teeth—

“Spy! Traitor!”

“Insult me as you please; but for his sake, for hers, and, above all, for your own, listen!

“Caroline Challoner lies at death’s door! ’Twas she who wrote those letters. She believes that John Herbert received them; that he was base and unmanly enough never to have acknowledged them, by even one line. The belief in his perfidy and ingratitude is killing her. That weight of woe lifted from her heart, her life may be spared. If she dies, Clara Trevor, as sure as there is a heaven above us, her death will lie heavily at your door.”

She paused for a moment before she plucked forth the packet of letters, and cast it at my feet, as she exclaimed—

“As God is my judge, when these letters returned to my hands, eight-and-forty hours ago, I knew not where to find this woman. Go, take them to her, doubtless she will reward your abject adoration. Possibly, since she cannot have the man she loves, she may be content to take him who has stooped to play the spy for her sake!”

“I—a spy—oh! Clara!”

“Not another word, sir. Begone, and never darken my doors again.”

“Miss Trevor!” said I, “your secret is your own. If your heart does not dictate your course, all I can say will be idle. I will endeavour to forgive the cruel words you have uttered, although, I fear, I can never forget them. For the rest, though you may not esteem, you shall not despise me. I *will* never darken your

doors again, so long as I live, until you ask me. But remember, even if I am at the other end of the world, should you ever need me, you have only to say one word, 'Come.' And now I only hope that you may find a truer friend, a more devoted servant, than Robert Penarvon."

And so I passed forth to the desolation which comes of despair.

What that proud heart suffered before it was subdued, Heaven only knows; the nobler nature, however, triumphed at last, and an hour later, with eyes a-fire and cheeks a-flame, Clara Trevor dashed into Caroline Challoner's chamber and placed the fatal letters in her hands.

There was nothing to keep back, so in earnest and hurried words Clara told the simple truth.

I do not think there were two purer, better, nobler creatures on earth than these two women; but the best of the sex, as far as my observation goes, are rarely or ever just, certainly never generous to each other, where a man stands between them.

The one was not so gracious as she might have been to her sometime rival, and she was utterly unappreciative of the fact, that the other's generous but Quixotic effort to rescue my unfortunate friend from prison on the night of the tempest had nearly cost her her life.

Hence it was I suppose that Caroline replied, like a cold but implacable virgin martyr—

"When I have found Him, I will forgive you; but not till then."

A hasty answer sprang to Clara's lips, but restraining herself she replied with quiet dignity—

"You might have spared me that, Miss Challoner."

Ask yourself, hereafter, if it be just. The world is at your feet ; you have fame, fortune ; you know that He loves you, that you have only to lift your finger to call him to your side. For me, God is merciful, and will, I hope, give me strength to bear my burthen ; perhaps, in time, will teach me to be grateful to those who love me better—far better than I deserve !”

And so “The Rival Queens” parted never to meet again on earth.

CHAPTER VI.

BROWN—"NO. 5."

"Not age, but sorrow hath wrought this change in me."

ALTHOUGH at this period he had passed out of my mind altogether, I hope the reader has not entirely forgotten poor Jemmy Green the clown.

He was a hard-working and industrious little chap; and ever since Herbert had set him up in business, after the accident, he had never looked back. To say that he was eternally grateful to his benefactor, were to put the case a little too mildly. Herbert's name was on his lips with a blessing from morning till night; while Mrs. Green, who was a pious little body, brought up her bairns to pray night and morning for "father, and mother, and Captain Herbert."

Jemmy was awfully cut up when he heard of Jack's misfortunes; but, as ill-luck would have it, he didn't hear of the fire until three or four weeks after the occurrence. The very day he did hear of it, he consulted "Liza," drew out every shilling he had in the bank, for Jack's use, and bolted down to Hillsborough, where he unfortunately arrived just in time to be too late.

When the arrest took place, Jemmy was confined to

his bed with rheumatism, and couldn't put one limb before the other; but as soon as he could pull himself together, he took the train to Bolingbroke. Still the same fatality—"Too late!"

He enquired here, there, everywhere, consulted the theatrical journals, but could obtain no clue to Herbert's whereabouts, and, indeed, his anxiety on this subject was a constant and abiding grief to the honest fellow, despite the fact that the world had prospered exceedingly with him. He had a capital and continually increasing business as a cabinet maker in Lisson Grove, where he kept two apprentices and five men in full swing.

Of course, he might have sat at home and smoked his pipe in peace, and enjoyed himself in the bosom of his family (which was continually increasing, too!), but, when Christmas came he could not keep out of the theatre, so just for occupation's sake he used to go to "Drury Lane" at night, to assist in the lime-light department.

Christmas had come, and the pantomime rehearsals were in full blast at "the Lane," but as yet Jemmy had not turned up, not being required until the scenic rehearsal, and Tom Smith (the renowned Signor Tomaso Schmiderini), who was engaged as harlequin, was looking out anxiously for his old pantomimic pal, to whom he had important information to communicate—information obtained in the following manner.

One morning, while the business for the "supers" in the harlequinade was being arranged, the clown, Harry P—, said to the super-master—

"Giles, I have a very important bit of 'business' here. Can you let me have a dependable man?"

"Yes, sir," says Giles, and, looking at his list, he calls out—

"No. 5, step this way."

Out steps No. 5 from the front rank.

A tall, soldier-like man, with dark eyebrows and weird, melancholy eyes, and hair as white as snow—a seedy suit of black, buttoned up to the throat, shining tall hat, boots patched but polished, dark gloves very much darned—a gentleman, from the top of his poor worn hat to the sole of his broken-down boots.

"Here, sir," says "No. 5," giving a sort of military salute.

When Tom Smith heard that voice, it pierced his heart like a knife. He had never heard but one voice like that in his life.

"Guv'nor, is that you?" he enquired, as soon as he recovered his breath.

"My name is Brown, sir," says "No. 5."

"Oh! Brown be blowed!" says Tom. "You're the captain or his ghost."

"Neither the one nor the other," says the gaunt man in black. "I'm simply Brown 'No. 5' at your service, gentlemen, and I'll do the best I can with anything you will entrust me with."

So there was an end of the conversation that morning.

"No. 5" had his "business" allotted to him, and did it with a skill and dexterity not usually found in gentlemen at eighteenpence or half-a-crown a night.

During the next three or four days, Tom tried to draw him out—nay, even suggested, with a certain amount of diffidence, that they should liquor up "round the corner," but only met with a curt—

"No, thanks, sir; not before dinner."

Dinner, poor fellow ! He looked as if he hadn't dined for weeks !

At the first rehearsal, Tom noticed that "No. 5" appeared in delicate health, and every day, though punctual to the moment, he seemed to get weaker and weaker.

On Friday, after the rehearsal, "Mr. Brown" was strolling leisurely from the stage-door, under the Piazza, towards Covent Garden.

Simultaneously an open landau, yoked to a pair of spanking greys, was being driven up Catherine Street from the Strand, towards the box entrance. Beside the driver, who was a stylish young man, there sat a woman of distinguished appearance, closely veiled, and enveloped in sables.

Just as the carriage approached the vestibule of the theatre, and the driver was about to alight, Brown had reached the end of the Piazza. At this moment a runaway horse attached to a hansom cab, without a driver, careered wildly down Bow Street, over Russell Street, and bang down Catherine Street towards the Strand.

The two greys caught the alarm, threw their heads in the air and made a bolt, but they had calculated without "Mr. Brown."

At peril of his life, he threw himself before them, and hung on their reins like grim death. They dragged him across towards Covent Garden, but, before they had reached the bottom of Bow Street, they had found their master, and fell back upon their haunches, quivering and vanquished.

The young man jumped out of the carriage to thank his preserver. During the struggle the woman had

never moved, but sat fixed as fate, calm and impassive, as if it made no earthly difference to her whether she were smashed or not.

The danger over, she lifted her veil mechanically. Mr. Brown lifted his hat; their eyes met; she started as if she had seen a ghost, vainly tried to speak, and fell back senseless.

The Duke (for it was he) looked from one to the other. "Mr. Brown" turned very white—white as his hair—stood for a moment irresolute, then bowed with grave politeness, walked rapidly up the Piazza, and disappeared within the stage door.

The lodge was empty, so he sat down in the porter's chair and coughed violently. When he withdrew his handkerchief it was stained with blood. He smiled curiously—and muttered—"So best."

Presently he picked himself up, as well as he could, crossed over Drury Lane, staggered down Kemble Street, and disappeared through one of the adjacent slums.

Meanwhile Caroline remained insensible, so there was nothing for it but to drive her home.

When she recovered, her first enquiry was—

"Where is he? Why doesn't he come?"

"Why doesn't *who* come?"

"He! he! the man who saved us."

"He went in at the stage door of Drury Lane," replied Frogmore; "that was the last I saw of him."

"Go! go! don't mind me; find him—bring him, Fred! For Heaven's sake," she almost screamed, "don't come back without him."

Without another word away went the Duke to Drury Lane—to consult the hall porter.

That important functionary vouchsafed the information that "There was such a person as 'his Grace' had described, connected with the theatre. Pantomime was rehearsed to-night at seven. Would 'his Grace' call again?"

"His Grace" did call again, and again after that, on Saturday morning, but there was no sign of "Mr. Brown." "He would be sure, however, to be at the final rehearsal on Saturday night. Oh, yes, he was on the supers' list, 'Brown No. 5.'"

When the Duke brought back this news to Caroline, she was like a mad-woman. She raved, she stormed, and tore her hair, as she cried—

"What! He! He! the truest gentleman, the greatest actor in the world! He a 'super!' He herd with *canaille*! Impossible! it could not be!"

Every word she spoke stabbed poor Frogmore, but he was thorough, staunch to the backbone, so he only plucked his huge, tawny moustache, and said—

"Look here, Carry, we don't know what may have happened. I'll go again to-night, and you shall go with me. Meanwhile I'll look up Penarvon, and get him to come with us. He knows all these people."

Poor lad! he remembered what followed for many a long day.

She dried her tears, took his hand, kissed it, and said—

"God bless you, Fred."

Then he left her alone with her great grief, and both waited anxiously for the night to come.

CHAPTER VII.

UNITED.

“And have I found the lost again?
Yes! I with him at last am wed,
Where hearts are never rent in twain
And tears are never shed!”—SCHILLER.

WHEN Tom Smith found “No. 5” absent from rehearsal on Friday night and Saturday morning, his anxiety increased tenfold, and he, too, impatiently awaited the night’s rehearsal.

The transformation scene had to be “set” and lighted after the harlequinade, so of course Jemmy Green “turned up” at last with his indiarubber bags, his boards and bull’s-eye, elastic tubing, weights, and the rest of the “paraphernalia,” as he called it.

As soon as Tom caught sight of his old chum, he bolted over to him, and eagerly communicated his suspicions as to the identity of “Mr. Brown.”

“You don’t say so!” exclaimed Jemmy, dropping the “paraphernalia” in a heap on the stage. “Good-bye; I’m off!”

“Where to?” enquires Tom.

“Wherever he is in this village,” shouts Jemmy. “You bet your bottom dollar on that!” and away he rushes to the super-master.

In an eager and excited manner he says, or rather shrieks—

"Mr. Giles, do you happen to know what's become o' 'No. 5,' and where he hangs out?"

"No, I don't, Jemmy," says Giles, "and what's more I don't think any o' my chaps does."

"Here, I say, lads, do any o' you know where 'Brown No. 5' roosts?"

"I should think somewhere in Buckingham Palace," roars out a Life Guardsman. "If he don't he orter, he's such a precious gentleman, he is!"

This graceful compliment elicits a yell of laughter.

"What for you laugh like zat?" enquires the good-natured ballet mistress, little Madame Folijambe, giving her fair but fractious pupils a rest for five minutes.

"Only because Giles axed the sweeps if they knew where a poor gent by the name o' Brown lived," says Jemmy, indignantly.

"Brown! Mistare Brown! What, ze knight of ze rueful countenance—ze *gentilhomme* vis ze beautiful vite air—Don Quixote, as zese graceless young monkeys call him?"

"Yes, poor fellow, that's the very gen'l'man we want."

"*Excusez-moi*," said Madame Folijambe, then beckoning to a bright little *coryphée*—"Fanny, *mon enfant*, tell Monsieur Jemmy vere your Don Quixote 'ang out 'is flag."

"Poor gentleman," says Fanny, "he lives where I live."

"For goodness sake, m'm," grasps Jemmy, "let Fan come with us and show us the way. It may be a matter of life and death."

• “*Avec plaisir. Allons ! Vite !* Off you go, Fanny. I will take your place till you return, but mind you come back sharp, *ma chère*.”

Away go Fanny, Tom, and Jemmy, scudding across the stage like wild-fire.

“Stop ! stop !” roars the foreman of the lime-light apparatus. “Here, I say, Jemmy, what’s a-goin’ to become o’ them there bags o’ yourn ?”

“Oh ! the bags be blanked !” roars Jemmy, and in a minute’s time they are at the stage door, literally cannoning against the Duke, Caroline, and myself as we are about to enter. Caroline grasps the situation in a moment. She knows Jemmy and Tom ; indeed, she was in Castletown at the time of the accident.

Before I can get out a word she says—

“Mr. Green—Mr. Smith—you know me ?”

Jemmy growls—

“Know you ? We ain’t likely to forget you. You’re the woman as *he* killed hisself for, you’re—”

“Never mind me, if you please,” she says, very gently. “Where is *he* ?—that’s what I want to know.”

“We’re a-goin’ to find him, and here’s Fanny Dexter a-goin’ to show us the way.”

“Then jump in,” says Frogmore, pointing to the carriage, “and you can talk as you go along.” Then he enquired of Fanny—“Where shall we drive to, my dear ?”

“No. 29½, Harwood’s Rents, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, sir,” she replied.

“All right,” says the Duke ; “in with you. Come down, Holmes, I’ll drive, and you can walk on. You, sir,” to Tom Smith, “please jump up beside me.”

Short as the drive was, Fanny found time to tell us

how she became acquainted with her "dear Don Quixote."

It seems that one night, or rather one morning early, after a long rehearsal of the pantomime, the poor child was wending her way homeward, when she was waylaid by a prowler of the Crutch and Toothpick Brigade, who had accosted her more than once without waiting for the ceremony of an introduction, and who on this occasion was more pressing than polite. In fact, the fellow had got his arm round the girl, when, to his astonishment, he found himself taken by the neck and the breech, and landed in the gutter on the other side of Drury Lane.

With a quiet "Excuse me, you have made a slight mistake here, sir," and "Permit me, my dear," "Mr. Brown" offered Fanny his arm, and escorted her home in safety.

"And now, m'm," says she, "comes the strangest part of the story. We had been living in the same house more nor a month, though neither of us knew it."

The girl continued to chatter away, unheeding and unheeded. Then all was silent, and we could hear nothing save the beating of our hearts, while we passed slowly up one slum, and down another.

Amidst the darkness and the silence Caroline muttered, impatiently—

"Shall we never get there?"

At length the carriage stopped.

Frogmore leaped down and opened the door.

"Here we are," he said; "jump out."

She sprang forth quickly; the girl followed.

Then I said to Caroline—

"We may be *de trop*, so I think we had better stay here till you send for us."

"Quite right, Bob," said the Duke. "We will stay here till morning if it is necessary."

Caroline took his hand and pressed it fervently; then she shook hands with me, and, turning to Fanny, she said—

"No words—no words, child—only lead the way. Quick! quick, or we may be too late. Too late! Oh! no, no, not that!"

The alley was dimly lighted with one small lamp. Quickly as the girl fled up the noisome court, Caroline kept pace with her without faltering, until they reached an open doorway at the farther end.

Immediately opposite was a flight of dilapidated oaken stairs (with rudely-carved balusters), rising one above the other, seven stories high. A small paraffin lamp stood lighted on a projection in the corner. Fanny took it in her hand, and knocked at the first door on the ground floor.

A sleepy old crone, with a red petticoat thrown hastily over her shoulders, appeared. The girl enquired for "Mr. Brown;" "was anything the matter with him?"

The old woman mumbled "she raally didn't know—he always attended on hisself—she never knew when he was in or out. Oh! yes, a rale gen'l'man he was. Allays paid his rent—allays—that is to say, allays, 'cept last week. Could the lady see him? In course she could if she liked—but his room's seven stories high—and your feet's younger nor mine, Fanny—so s'pose you show the lady hup yourself."

Up they went, flight after flight, till they reached

the summit of the house—an attic just beneath the roof; there was only one, so there could be no mistake about it.

“That will do—thank you, child.”

“Shall I stay with you, lady?”

“No—no—I’ll light you down, only go—go quickly.”

She stampad her foot fiercely and said—

“Go I tell you—go! Stop! Tell those men not to come here, until I call them!”

As the girl disappeared in the darkness, Caroline approached the door, and tapped gently.

No reply. She tapped again—still no answer. Then she entered the room. Immediately opposite was a window, through which the moonlight streamed clear as noontide; to her right a small, empty, rusty fireplace, one chair, and a small table. Writing materials—a letter addressed to her, and one to me—an empty medicine bottle, and a lamp shedding a dim light around.

To her left, the bed—on which *He* lay, quite still and calm—the white face, on the white pillow, the abundant, curling, white hair, forming an aureole round the white brow—the eyes looking far, ever so far away.

For a moment she stood, as if spellbound—then the unforbidden voice murmured—as in a dream—

“Caroline—come back to me! Come back, my darling! Oh! come back—before I die.”

With a wild cry of mingled grief and joy she flew towards him. She lifted him in her arms—she pressed him to her heart—she kissed his brow, his eyes, his cheeks, his lips—she tried to breathe the vitality of her

rich, ripe womanhood into his enfeebled life—she showered caresses and endearments upon him.

“Oh! Jack!” she cried, “I have waited so long for you—so long and so patiently—now that I have found you, don’t leave me. Dear God! don’t let him die—not for my sake; I know I am not worthy of him, but for his own! Oh! Jack! Jack! my prince! my king of men! My darling! live—oh! live for me!”

“Carry,” he said, and the old music trembled through his voice, “I was very proud, and very wicked—and God has punished me for doubting you—but now I am forgiven, for He has brought you back to me before I die.”

“No—no! Not that! For His dear love—don’t say that! You shall not die! No, no!”

“Hush! dear, hush!” he said, and the poor white hand, thin almost to transparency, stole round her as he partially arose. “See, sweetheart.” And he placed his other hand in his bosom, as he drew forth the miniature she had given him in the old, happy time, long ago. The brilliants and the blue-black hair were twined around it still.

“It has never left me living—don’t let them take it from me when I am dead. Now let me ‘kiss you, love, as bridegroom kisses bride.’

“Ah! I am happy now!”

The moon sinks to rest beneath the clouds.

The lamp flickers and goes out.

The bride and groom (are they not so?) are left alone; alone with silence and darkness—silence, dread and sinister—darkness awful and profound.

We wait and watch below, while the hours creep on with leaden feet.

Still silence and darkness.

Heavens ! will the day never dawn ?

At last. Hark ! hark !

The birds from near Gray's Inn make glad the air with music, at sight of the new-born day. The sun, emerging from the Orient, sheds a misty, nebulous radiance over every land and every sea—over everything beneath the cope of heaven—from the palace of the prince, to the hovel of the beggar—penetrating everywhere with tremulous shades of tender azure, and delicate violet, which quicken presently to imperial purple, and leap at last into golden fire, lighting up earth, air, and sky, and flooding every nook and cranny of even that desolate chamber with God's blessed sunshine.

Beneath those radiant beams the lost glory of John Herbert's youth comes back, illumining his face with an angel's beauty.

He has passed from the darkness of the night, into the splendour of the eternal morning !

And Caroline ?

Hours later we found her, a smile upon her lips, her arms twined round his neck, in the last embrace of love and death.

In life they had been severed ; in death they were united.

END OF BOOK THE SEVENTH.

EPILOGUE.

“ Oh, mighty Time ! O ! light days lightly fled,
Ye bear away all tears and griefs of ours.
But ye are pitiful, and never tread
Upon our faded flowers.”

HERMAN MERIVALE.

AT LAST!

“ By the rapture within us, the rapture around us,
By God who has made us, and love who hath crown'd us,
One sense, and one soul, we are blent, ne'er to sever,
For ever and ever! For ever and ever!”

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

HEARTS bleed and break, men and women die, as we must die to-morrow, or the next day. Still, the great world moves on, ever changing, never resting, and the womb of the mighty mother still teems with myriad ages of the great “to be,” while we, poor insects of to-day, who deem that the eyes of the universe are fixed upon the ant heaps, midst which we live, and breathe and have our being, move over to the infinite, and are forgotten.

Of all who flattered and beslavered John Herbert and Caroline Blake, a year ago, just half-a-dozen faithful hearts bewail their untimely fate to-day, as they bewailed them yesterday, as they will bewail them always.

Time, which stands still with no one, smites, with impartial hand, the monarch on his throne and—

“ The poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.”

Amongst those who have “moved over” to the “pale

magician" during the past year is Walton, the solicitor of Rosemount.

His life has been one long fraud, and the curses of the widow and the orphan have followed him to his dishonoured grave. One of the greatest sufferers by his villainy is Clara Trevor, whom he has robbed of her inheritance. She is left penniless. Notwithstanding this calamity, the society journals announce that "having succeeded to a large fortune from a distant relative she has retired from the profession of which she was so distinguished an ornament, and will act no more."

Whence the fortune comes from she knows not; but *I* do.

With the exception of a few trifling legacies, Caroline, by her will, bequeathed her entire estate, real and personal, to Herbert, should he survive her; failing him, the property was to revert to me; failing me, to the General Theatrical Fund.

With the aid of Messrs. Pearpoint, I have devised a pious fraud (the only fraud that eminent firm has ever connived at!), by means of which half of Caroline's fortune has been settled on Clara. The legacy has not been bequeathed in Caroline's name though. I fear Clara would starve sooner than be indebted to wealth from such a source.

The legator is supposed to be some distant relative of Fairfax's, recently deceased, in Japan.

What is it Evelyn says in the play?—

"And she owes it all to me, and doesn't even guess it; to me, the poor scholar, whose hand she rejected, whose love she despised! There's some spite in that!"

Bronson sent me word some ten months ago, that Brown and his wife were amongst Walton's victims. ¹⁷

The hoary scoundrel had swindled these poor old creatures out of the savings of a lifetime, and nothing was before them but the workhouse.

On receipt of the news, I wired to Fred to let them have whatever they wanted, and to arrange with old Titus, the station-master, to pack them off to town at once; and here they are, keeping house for me.

Like all the rest of us, they don't grow younger, but they do their best; and, after all, it is pleasant to have people near me, who, for so long a time, were near Her—and—my friend and benefactor, Fairfax.

Mrs. Brown goes to Regent's Park every Sunday, and "her ashes live in their wonted fires;" for every succeeding visit supplies her with abundant food for conversation during the remainder of the week.

Shall I confess it? Yes!

I've grown rather to look forward to these disconnected gossips, in which the past is mixed up with the present, and the future.

I like to listen to the garrulous, honest, old soul.

She is certainly not the rose; but she has been near the rose—and that is the next best thing.

I have kept my word. For a year—a whole weary, dreary year—I have never been to Florence Villa.

I have seen Her often, though she has never seen me. She seems much changed—not in her beauty, for that is more imperial than ever. She is not the Clara of old though: her demeanour is sad, and the old brightness and joyousness appear to have passed away. She has been chastened by suffering.

Mrs. Le Blanc and I are still excellent good friends. She is free of my chambers, and when she is in town, she often drops in for a cup of my famous tea. She

always talks of *Her*, and constantly urges me to renew my visits.

• One day she is particularly pressing. She alleges that Clara would be more than glad to see me; but she is so proud that she cannot make the first advance.

I answer—

“ ‘Her pride is yet no mate for mine.’ Besides, I’ve really no time. I am going to America.”

Mrs. Le Blanc is positively startled.

“Going to America!” she gasps.

“Yes,” I reply. “I’ve been very seedy of late, and the doctor prescribes a sea voyage. Besides, I can kill two birds with one stone—while my collaborator produces our new drama here, I can produce it in the States simultaneously, and so ensure the copyright in both countries. My berth is already taken in the *Alaska*; she makes the passage in seven days, and sails from Liverpool on Friday next.”

There is an awkward pause for a moment; then Mrs. Le Blanc insinuates, pleadingly—

“Surely, you’ll come and say good-bye.”

“I say good-bye now, dear Laura. Bless you for all your care and kindness to me, and to—to *Her*!”

“And you really mean to leave the country?”

“Yes,”

“But perhaps you may be shipwrecked, or drowned, and we, I mean *She*, would never see you again.”

“Much she’d care about that.”

Then she bursts out—

“How stupid you men are! Do you mean to say that you’ve the inhumanity, the positive barbarity, to leave the country without a word to the poor thing?”

“That word is for her to speak!”

"Very well, very well; I've done. Mind! I don't say 'good-bye;' I won't say 'good-bye!' Great Shakesperian scholar as you are, I suppose you never met with these two lines in your researches—

"Have you not heard it said full oft
A woman's nay doth stand for nought?"

I've no patience with you, Robert Penarvon. For a clever man, you are the greatest goose I ever met in the whole course of my life."

With this she flounces out of the room, leaving me to my dreams.

"Could she have spoken truly? Could *She*—"

While I am building castles in the air, Clerehead bounces in upon me with Frogmore—just returned from Egypt with his regiment.

The lad is as brown as an Arab, and as lean as a greyhound—for he has had hard times of it out there.

They've made a man of him, however, and it is pleasant to hear his cheery voice in my lonely room, to feel his honest fist once more; but both our eyes grow dim as we think of "the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still."

We chat a little about current events, then he says—

"Bob, look here, you know. Milly and I were spliced ten days ago! You may well look flabbergasted! The pater here would have it done on the quiet, you know, or I should have had you for my best man.

"Next week we're going abroad for a month or two. Milly would like to run down to Cornwall before we leave; she's fixed on Wednesday, and you're to go with us.

"Very sorry," I replied, "but I sail for America on

Friday, and I have my baggage and my outfit to look after."

"Now, Bob," said Clerehead, "that isn't friendly. Milly will be awfully cut up if you don't go; in fact, she'll take no excuse—will she, Fred?"

"Certainly not," responded Frogmore.

"Very well then," I replied; "I'll send my traps on to-morrow, and, as we come back from Penzance, I'll leave you at Bristol, and go straight on to Liverpool."

"Oh! that be hanged!" said Clerehead; "we'll go down to Liverpool with you, and see the last of you—won't we, Fred? Train leaves Paddington Wednesday morning at six-thirty, sharp, so make a note of it. I'll bring a basket of prog, a hamper of wine, and plenty of 'baccy."

"Now mind, Bob, I shall tell Milly she may expect you," said the Duke, and away they went.

I devoted all the next day to my preparations, and arranged for Brown to meet me at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, on Thursday night.

I went to bed early (at ten o'clock, I think), so as to make sure of the morning, but I couldn't sleep a moment, for the thought that I was leaving the land in which *she* lived, that perhaps I should never see her again.

The tardy hours crept on; at length it struck two.

I sprang out of bed, feverish and unrefreshed, pulled the string of the shower-bath to cool my burning brain; in vain, it throbbed more wildly than before. I slipped on my clothes, rushed into the Strand, hailed the first cab, and drove to Florence Villa. I bade the

man wait, while I walked round and round the nest in which my bird lay sleeping--dreaming perhaps. •

Did she ever dream of me, during the nights and nights I have watched and waited through the cold; through the rain, through the snow, hoping only to catch a glimpse of her shadow as it fled by? Psha! What matters? In a few hours we shall be parted for ever, and she—oh! no—not another's—not another's! I couldn't bear that!

I drive back to my chambers more feverish, more unrefreshed, than when I started.

Again to bed. I plunge and toss and turn; at last, of course, when I ought to get up, I am overpowered with a stupor of sleep. Brown has a difficulty in waking me, and has almost to drag me out of bed.

I dress mechanically, swallow a cup of coffee, and start for Paddington, behind a poor struggling horse that has been out all night, and breaks down on the way.

Though I have abandoned all hope of catching the train, I take another cab, and promise cabby double fare, if I am in time.

Clerehead is waiting at the central entrance puffing his everlasting cigarette.

"Pretty fellow you are!" he bursts out; "Good job it's a special, or you'd have been left behind."

"A special to Penzance!" I exclaimed. "Good heavens! do you know what it will cost?"

"Deuce a bit; I neither know nor care. The 'boy' pays for all," so saying, he bundles me into a carriage almost stop of the "boy."

A lovely day, but a tiresome, tedious journey, though we only stop three or four times on the road. The

Duke and his father-in-law smoke, and chatter incessantly ; for once, I can't even smoke. By-and-bye they get lunch ready, and press me to join them, but in vain. I nibble a biscuit, sip a glass of claret, and subside into silence. They give me up as a bad job, and return to their infernal cackle. Gabble, gabble ! how they do gabble ! The Commission—Pigott—The Shah—the German Emperor—the Naval Review—Macbeth at the Lyceum—Is Chivalry Possible ?—the Exposition—the Squashing of Boulanger—the Great Strike—the Triple Alliances—the Everlasting Eastern Question—and Heaven knows what else.

Penance at last ! They jump out first.

As I reach the platform I encounter Milly, who gushes at me, and then creeps up to Frogmore, coyly taking his arm, and asserting a kind of proprietary right in him, which he doesn't appear to dislike.

As they move away, turning round to get my rugs, I am confronted face to face by Mrs. Le Blanc and—Clara !

I lift my hat. They each drop me a stately bow in return, but vouchsafe no further recognition.

Clerehead comes bustling up, and says, in his jolliest manner—

“Now, good people—carriages waiting—not a moment to lose, if we are to reach Trepolyia before dark.” Then, offering his arm to Mrs. Le Blanc, “Allow me, madam ! Bob, you'll see after Miss Trevor.”

We are alone. She moves towards the carriage. I walk beside her. She doesn't utter one word ; no more do I.

Decidedly I am glad that I leave England on Friday !

In two minutes, we are stowed away, the men in one carriage, the ladies in the other.

At length we stop before the churchyard of a little Cornish village, lying almost at the edge of the sea.

A tall, stalwart man, clad in black, with hair and beard of iron grey, and a great grizzled giant, who, unmistakeably, has been a soldier in his time, await us at the gate. They are the vicar and the sexton. We alight and bow to them.

I (for, alas! I have been here before!) shake hands with the Vicar. Clerehead and Frogmore bow, throw away their cigars, and assist the ladies to alight.

One thing strikes me as being strange, but not incongruous. Although a year and more have elapsed since—since—we are all in deep mourning.

Though we are in mourning, Nature is keeping holiday. What a heavenly prospect opens before us; how venerable is the old church, the porch of which is almost embowered in ivy, woodbine, honeysuckle, Virginia creepers, and the sweet-smelling clematis. The setting sun bathes in ever-changing beauty the stately trees, rare flowers, and choice shrubs which deck the spot "where the fathers of the village hamlet sleep."

This very day—this very hour—the flowers seem to have leaped into life. Masses of rich ripe rhododendrons and delicate lilacs are relieved here and there by stately sycamores, luxuriant yews, and cypress, the various tints of which serve to throw the more glowing colours into vivid contrast. The yellow laburnum fills the perfumed air with flakes of golden fire, while, high above the rest, towers a magnificent horse-chestnut, glorious with the beauty of its ripened bloom.* And,

bark! hark! there is a whole grove of feathered songsters quiring a jubilate!

• Happy the dead who rest in this lovely solitude, far away from the clamour and squalor of the mighty city—far away from its ignoble cares, and yet more ignoble strife. Here, when the end comes, may I, too, sleep my last sleep, beside the friends I love the best.

The Vicar leads the way down the central avenue, overshadowed with huge elms. We follow, until we reach an opening beyond.

Before us, in the very centre of God's acre, three tombstones, which stand side by side, cast their shadows on three graves, embedded with living flowers of rarest beauty.

High above, from an eminence at the back towers a Corinthian column of white marble, beautifully flecked with black streaks. It is shattered at the summit, as if it had been cleft with a thunder-bolt. At its base lie two broken laurel wreaths, also carved in marble, encircling this inscription in letters of gold:—

“IN MEMORY

OF

A CONSTANT WOMAN, AND AN HONEST MAN,

THIS SHAFT WAS PLACED HERE

BY THEIR FRIEND

JAMES CLEREHEAD,

WHO LOVED THEM LIVING, AND WHO MOURNS THEM DEAD.”

The following epitaphs are on the tombstones.

On the one to our right:—

‘TO THE HONOURED MEMORY OF

THE BEST OF MOTHERS,

THIS MEMORIAL IS INSCRIBED BY HER SON,

JOHN HERBERT.”

On the one to the left:—

“IN MEMORIAM,
CAROLINE BLAKE,
DAUGHTER OF THE HON. AND REVEREND PHILIP BLAKE
(A.M., TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN),
ERECTED BY HER SORROWING FRIENDS,
FREDERICK AUGUSTUS VEE,
AND MILLICENT, HIS WIFE
(*Duke and Duchess of Frogmore*).

“ ‘Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,
Nor the furious winter rages,
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages.’ ”

On the central tombstone, which stands a little higher than the other two, these words are inscribed:—

“SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
JOHN HERBERT,
GENTLEMAN.
IN GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION OF HIS BENEFACTOR,
THIS STONE WAS ERRECTED BY
JAMES GREEN, OF LISSON GROVE, LONDON.”

“ ‘His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world—
This was a Man! ’ ”

Clara has two laurel wreaths.

The one she places on *His* grave, the other upon *Hers*. Then, sinking on her knees, she makes the sign of the sacred symbol on her brow.

Mrs. Le Blanc murmurs audibly the words of Longfellow—

“Dust thou art, to dust returneth,
Ne’er was spoken of the soul.”

As Clerehead strolls out, he mutters half unconsci-

ously, "Poor Carry! Poor Jack! as their blessed Bard says,

'They should have died hereafter!'"

Then Milly breaks down, and Fred leads her away. Mrs. Le Blanc raises Clara from the ground, and they too pass silently and sadly forth—the Vicar and the sexton follow.

I remain alone with the dead. Yes—quite alone.

She has left me without one word, one sigh, one look. A few hours more, the sea will be between us, and perchance I may never look upon her face, or hear her voice again.

I was mad to dream that she, in the splendour of her beauty, the effluence of her beauty, could ever bestow a passing thought on me—me, whose brow is furrowed with care—whose hair is already besprinkled with snow—me, who am old before my time—yes, old, and worn, and broken, hopeless, friendless, and alone; yes, henceforth always alone!

Up to this moment I had dared to hope; but now—!

In my despair and desolation I bow my weary head upon the stone which marks poor Jack's grave, then, utterly unmanned, I break down and weep—yes, weep like a child.

Am I awake or am I dreaming?

A soft arm steals around my neck—a soft cheek nestles against mine—a soft voice murmurs in my ear—

"No—not alone, Robert. Never alone again so long as I live!"

The next moment her heart is beating against my own, her loving lips on mine.

Al! then I know it is no dream, it is reality!

Not life, nor death, nor time, nay, not eternity itself, can ever recall those loving words, or steal those kisses from my lips !

The sun, red as blood, rushes down the west, flooding sky, and sea, and shore, with his burning beams, then vanishes into the coming gloom.

As yet my heart is too full for words.

All is silent.

The corncrake has ceased to croak, the frogs in yonder pool are still, even the nightingale has ceased to sing.

At last my darling murmurs softly—

“Robert—night has fallen, and see, darkness is gathering o’er the deep.”

I make answer—

“Oh! Hush! hush! Darkness can never come where you are, light of my life, my own now, and evermore!”

Even as I spoke, as if in answer to my words, the moon rose bright and clear, and the stars came out in countless myriads, glittering like a vast coronal of jewels on the boundless brow of night.

And thus, hand to hand, and heart to heart, we passed forth, outward and onward, and home—never to part again, please God, so long as life shall last !

THE END.

